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July 30th 1923 Vol XLI No 6

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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One Novel, Two Novelettes, Complete

TO *COTTSWOLD OMMONY*, of the Indian Forest Service, nothing matters but forests; so when the American missionary and the Hindu priests of a native State in India get into a fight over the tree tax, *Ommony* sees a chance to obtain his objective by playing one party off against the other. And he does, ably assisted by his giant dog with the uncanny brain. "DIANA AGAINST EPHESIANS," by Talbot Mundy, a novel complete in the next issue.

WHEN two men offered the *Piegan Kid* thousands of dollars to commit a murder he accepted without telling them they had mistaken him for another man. After all one gunman is as good as another, he decided. Then, looking to his six-gun, he set out to fulfil his agreement in the manner which seemed best to him. "SIR PIEGAN PASSES," a complete novelette in the next issue, by W. C. Tuttle.

"I'VE kept yo' daddy's gun in good shape. Ye air the only Collingame left now," said the old Kentucky mountaineer, and would have been astounded to know that his grandson intended going after the family enemy as a sworn deputy to the sheriff. But that was to be the least surprizing development in this renewal of an ancient feud. "A SOUND," by H. M. Sutherland, is another complete novelette in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

***Adventure* is out on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**

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Adventure
JULY 30 1923
VOL XLI No 6

A Complete Novelette by J Allan Dunn

The TREASURE

Author of "The Black Banner," "The Pigeons of Wong Foo," etc.

ALL the way down from Suva Long had faced the possibility of disaster. That Hope Island—his island—should be wiped out seemed too crushing a blow for Fate to give him after all his years of toil, of perseverance against odds. And now just as he was about to reap his hard-earned harvest the wheel of Fortune stopped at zero.

He strove to keep an open mind until he found out at first hand—to be neither optimistic nor pessimistic. But the latest cable and wireless reports following the news of the tidal wave that had flooded Suva and Levuka, inundated both Upolu and Apia, swept schooners ashore at Papeete and damaged the Tongas and the Cook group, agreed that a seaquake had occurred somewhere below the line of the Tropic of Cancer. Hope Island was volcanic, one of the type that proved Darwin's theory of subsidence as at Ponape, marked as V. I. and A. on the charts—volcanic island and atoll combined.

Six years he had put in there planting coco-palms. First the nursery, with the nuts covered with seaweed and soft mud from the beach, watered daily, protected from the wind by screens. Then the setting out with more mud and seaweed for the young plants—arduous work with raw native labor to dig the three-foot holes twenty feet apart before the rains set in.

More watering and protection under shades of plaited palm-leaves. Struggling with trade to eke out his capital to meet the Government-set wages for his laborers, scarce and unruly at the best. Fights with disease. An iron hand over mutinous help. Borrowed capital and ruinous interest. A long fight against the big companies, the war, when patriotism had won over self-interest and he had gone back to do his bit, returning to find his gardens wild, the jungle threatening his clearings, his buildings dismantled by enemy raiding.

And at last victory. Groves of graceful palms, waving their plumes a hundred feet high, sixty nuts average to the tree—and copra a hundred dollars the ton.

He had held off until full maturity. Then he had sailed to Suva to get machinery for expressing the oil instead of selling the crude copra, machinery for preparing the husks into coir side-product for matting and fertilizer. The island left under the superintendence of Tikala, the giant Samoan who had proved his trustworthiness, to break up and dry the kernels in the sun.

If all this should be gone— It was not merely the lost labor but the time. He was thirty-three now, young enough to look

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forward to his prime and the full enjoyment of it, wealth won by his brains and the sweat of his body. Six years more and he would be close to forty.

And Tikala? The recruited laborers?

He resolutely shook off the depression that persisted. The next day should see the solitary peak rising from the sea, its naked crags rosy in the mounting sun, mist-wreathed, the dark bush beneath and then the emerald fringe of the plantations.

If the worst came to the worst he would have to start again. Long's lean jaw set and his eyes grew hard. He would have to start at the bottom. As a trader's agent, if he had to sell the schooner to pay his debts.

There was a girl—a woman now—who had waited six years in San Francisco for him to make good. He would not have his wife share the breaking-down climate of year-long existence on a South Sea atoll, the months of pitiless rain, the intermittent fevers that his own ruggedness had fought off.

With the island in full bearing he could live with her in Honolulu, launch out as a planter, hire others—he knew a good man or two—to make his profits for him on shares.

If only he had not sent her the cable before the news came of the quake! She would know he was personally safe, but she would be worrying—as he was.

He paced the deck until midnight. His mate, Hansen, with Jimmy Brown, his supercargo, shared with the whole ship's company, from Lee Sue the cook to the last of the native crew, the premonition of trouble. There were no chants forward; the *Hope* plowed through the seas with Fear perched on the main spreaders, the stars shining down like cold eyes of fateful gods, regarding immutably the little works of man, his futile aspirations.

Long was up on deck again at four bells with the stars still bright but the feel and smell of dawn in the air. The waves ran purple to a purple sky that in the east was slowly changing hue, paling against the rise of the sun. In the southeast, where Hope Island should be, only obscurity. The sound of the wind in the stays was a wail.

He hauled the log. The *Hope* was on her best point of sailing, reaching into a fair breeze, and was making ten knots—forty sea miles since midnight. This speed, figured with his last noon reckoning, should leave them within fifty miles of their goal; the daylight should discover the peak.

He tried to sweep the horizon with night-glasses. It was Hansen's watch, and he did not leave the deck, both men impatient for the day.

Suddenly the whole sky seemed to shiver, to wave like a shaken curtain. Its hue changed like the side of a dying dolphin; the stars paled, as if they withdrew, pin-pointed and lusterless, then were gone.

The sun shot up, bombing sea and land with golden light, rising in a sky of clear green that shaded to olive at the zenith, clouds of pink and crimson, like rose-leaves, afloat in it. Now the horizon ran in a clear dark line of indigo about the sea, which held the color of Concord grapes in the hollows, deepest sapphire in the ridges, every eastern facet tipped with flowing gold.

There was a native in the forespreaders. His call of "Land!" was unecessary. There was a smudge of blue in the southeast toward which they went surging fast, flying-fish about them, dolphins after them, sea-birds winging out from their rookeries, swooping down as if in greeting.

The watch on deck took up their comrade's glad cry. Brown came hurrying up in his pajamas, barefooted, his wrinkled but curiously boyish face eager. Hansen was by the rail, his Norse face blank, his blue eyes strangely vacant. Long's mouth, showing under the glasses, was a straight line.

"What's wrong?" demanded Brown. "There she blows, don't she?"

"She bane look purty low to me," said Hansen.

"Low? Right shape, ain't she? What's eating you?"

Hansen shook his head. His sea-lore told him, as it did Long, what Brown's experience could not cover. There was something wrong with the island's gage as it loomed up sharper and sharper, finlike.

Hansen shielded his gaze against the sun-glare with his left hand and Brown followed his example. Long had the hood drawn on his lenses. When he took them away at last his face was lined and haggard, though he made no comment save his orders.

"I'll take the deck, mister," he said to Hansen. "We'll be well off by nine o'clock. On a flood tide. Morning, Jimmy."

The man in the forespreader came down as the watch changed. Long posted a

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Tahitian quartermaster in his place with special instructions to look for water discoloration suggesting shoals, though the chart showed twenty-five hundred fathoms up to within three miles of the island.

There had been another subsidence beyond doubt. He resolutely thrust all thought of loss of life, of damage from him, pinning his faith on the fact that the island still existed. After a while he took the wheel, craving something to do, some action.

The time came when the bush verdure showed. The mists had left the crags. Slowly the land lifted—lifted until there could be no mistake. There was no lighter green of palms, no white specks of buildings, no flag whipping in the wind. Only a wild, white line of surf lapping at the verge of jungle. All hands were on deck, the cook beside his galley, the loin-clothed cabin stewart in the bows, gazing landward with solemn faces and heavy hearts.

Long was the first to see the thread of smoke rising from the deep ravine that split Hope Island, down which ran the little river he had named Esperanza Creek. It feathered across the field of his glass, and he gave a sigh of relief, wiping quick sweat from his forehead as he turned to Hansen and Brown with his news.

"They're alive—some of 'em anyway. The old reef's gone. There's a new one spouting like fury. No opening in it probably. We'll sail along it for a look-see. Get the boat ready, mister. I'll go in it."

"They bane see us," said Hansen.

The smoke was rising in puffs now in some sort of signal. Long turned to the native to whom he had given over the wheel.

"What kind, that smoke talk?" he asked.

The man grinned.

"That speak all right, *kapitani*," he said. "Quick smoke *maiti*.* Suppose he come slow, all same plenty *piritia*."†

"Bane trouble enough," said Hansen aside to Brown as he went forward to see the whaleboat overhauled for launching.

LONG'S tanned face was like whity-brown paper; his dark-gray eyes looked bruised as the schooner sailed alongside the great mass of rock and dead coral upthrust in the same convulsion that had submerged his island with all his terraces, his plantations, gardens, buildings, all his works, at least a hundred feet. The new reef thundered and the surf flew like smoke as the breakers rolled over it.

He was himself in the rigging, watching for some place where he could hurdle the barrier, some place where he could land. Beach there was none. The gorge of Esperanza Creek had widened into a lagoon where he might gain entry if the new reef allowed.

The blow had fallen, and already he felt as if he had known of it since it occurred, two weeks ago. The personal part of it he now carried like a heavy load that he could not cast off until he knew the worst. The smoke message was ambiguous, the code limited.

The bush rose straight from the water inside the reef. Three hundred feet up on a cape of lava he could make out a few figures—not more than a dozen; and he had left forty.

The schooner came about at his order and resailed her course. Then she hauled off land a little and went into the wind while Long slid down the halyards to the deck.

The boat was launched, six men at the sweeps, seated in pairs, Long in the stern, steering them to the place he had chosen. He had some supplies in the boat, medical stores and food. The survivors would have to be taken aboard back to Suva.

There was nothing left on Hope Island for white men to do. Not even land suitable for replanting. He would have to give them what he had left—between four and five hundred dollars. He had to see the laborers back to their home islands. He was not responsible for the quake; but he felt that he was for their destitution, in so far as he could mend it.

Long let five waves go snaking by, the men backing oars against the lifting rush that went gliding up the underwater ramp to shatter in geysering spray while the bulk of it slid on, swelling across the inner lagoon into the partly drowned forest. They were careful to keep the boat at exact right angles to the progress of the breakers, though that was principally Long's task.

They had to ride the crest of a superwave, to row like supermen to keep ahead of the ever threatening crest. It called for the utmost strength and dexterity of all seven of them, for all of Long's judgment. The rowers watched him intently as he stood

*Good.
†Trouble.

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balanced in the stern of the sixteen-foot whaleboat, glancing over his shoulder for a billow of sufficient bulk and buoyancy to carry them across to safety. The muscles played lightly under the dark skins, under the browner cover of Long's arms, naked from his singlet.

No man could take that hurdling hazard unmoved. There was excitement in the eyes of all the natives, beginning to sparkle in those of Long. A spill in ordinary water—outside of sharks—would not bother any of them; but an upset on a jagged reef, crashed down on the rough rock so lately upthrust from the bottom, rolled and smothered by backwash and following wave, meant death.

The chosen billow came rising out of the flooding sea, forced upward by the slant of the barrier. Higher and closer till it shut out the sun that showed vaguely through the top of it, making it look, with its streaks of foam, like flawed emerald.

"*Ail*" shouted Long; and the oars plunged, bent to the sturdy strokes; the boat lunged forward yet seemed ever to stay as if it were thrust into the breaker just below the mounting, curling, threatening crest.

"*Ail*" he shouted again, timing the stroke as the water seethed and hissed about them; and they rushed on, cushioned from the reef by two fathoms of the yeasty water that bore them.

Now it ceased to lift; it changed angle, shallowed, and Long could see the dark-purple shadow of the reef rising through the green like a broaching whale to meet them.

"*Ail*"

They went at it, levering into the tough fluid with straining muscles and heaving chests, puffins winging about them as if hoping for catastrophe, the splashing boom of breaking water, Long using the sweep like a fish its fin, guiding the boat with dexterous play of blade.

"*Ail*"

An oar broke! Half of it was whirled away. The rower fell back against the man behind him, throwing the stroke into confusion.

Instantly, like a half-tamed monster that had borne with them too long, the great wave seemed to turn on them. The boat slued, losing speed. The crest hung over them like a hammer of Neptune.

Long thrust his oar deep and set his strength against it, the gunwale as fulcrum, until he thought the muscles would be torn from their places. His eyes protruded; he could taste the pounding blood, salty through the tissues of his mouth.

The rowers watched him while they tugged for the life that only he could hold for them. The whole weight of the boat was on the thrust of his sweep, bending, bending like a bow. His face was like a runner's at the final sprint, tongue out, a mask of desperate determination. Sweat broke out on him as slowly the boat straightened with the timely aid of the fifth oar on one side.

Then as the spending wave hurled its surplus into the lagoon they rocketed with it, their keel barely scraping, safe in twelve fathoms of smooth water, easing their stroke, still propelled by the last force of the breaker.

Long grinned at them with the sweat streaming into his eyes, wiping it away with one hand, the other holding the now trailing sweep. Somehow that strenuous exertion had been what he needed. The triumph physical had restored his mental balance to an acceptance of what had happened while there was born anew his old philosophy, his old strength to face any obstacle.

The elasticity of his spirit, which had come back the harder for opposition and reverse in the past six years, reasserted its resiliency. He was himself again, sure of his own prowess, sure of ultimate victory over mischance and evil circumstance.

Even Tikala's tale did not dim the steady luster that shone in his eyes. The natives gained fresh equanimity. The white man dominant shouldered their burden; they forgot their wos in their belief in his supremacy.

"It came in the night, so that we had no chance," said Tikala in his sonorous Samoan tongue that Long spoke proficiently, with other dialects. "First there was a great wind blowing that tore off the iron roof of the copra-shed and awakened us. We rushed out, falling over each other, and a high shape of water was rushing in from the sea, blotting out the stars. It brought with it cold and a stink of decayed weed and bottom mud. It rose like a cliff, and it was streaked with flame. The lagoon lay bare, sucked out beyond the reef. Back of us the mountain heaved, and we fled for the high land in a mighty roar of wind, of water and of crashing trees.

"Some climbed the boughs and were lost. Twenty are missing; five have broken limbs; three were pulped with their bellies

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split open and their bones smashed. All night there was a furious storm with the rain falling so hard we knew which was sea and which fresh water only by the taste.

"I tried to mend the legs and arms of those who still breathed. Then we sought food, made fire and waited for your coming. That is the tale, O Lonogi. All the plantation is destroyed and sunk, as you see. The gods were angry and took sacrifice. Now their wrath is over, and you have come. It is good."

The next day at ebb the injured men were ferried to the reef on a raft, carried over the pitted rock and coral and transhipped to the *Hope*, where they lay in splints, mattressed on the floor of the main cabin.

That night the *Hope* set out to sea again, rebound for Suva.

LONG walked up the Main Street of Suva, lawns and flamboyant trees and the lagoon to his right, to his left a quite imposing array of offices, clubs, hotels and stores with glittering plate-glass fronts and attractive window displays; in reflective mood.

He had got his injured men into hospital, had shared with them his last money and contracted to send them back to their homes. All of them save the crew of the *Hope* and Tikala. Tikala, who swore that the name of Lonogi was his name, the blood of Lonogi his blood and the fortune of Lonogi that of Tikala, his brown brother.

There was the cash to be raised for complete wages and for the passage money. That meant a mortgage on the *Hope*—for he was unwilling to sell the schooner at the prices offered. He was at a loose end, though he still held on to it. Without the *Hope*—sold or mortgaged—he would be broke and without a job, marked already as an unlucky man and as such not overwelcome in Suva.

They commiserated with him at the clubs but turned away with British indifference to the problems of the stranded Yank. The mortgage was not forthcoming even with a premium offered unless the message sent to him from Quong Yu meant a loan.

It might mean a charter. Quong owned ships and chartered others. Long might stick as skipper. He hated to lose his independence, the grip of his hands on his own ladder of fortune, to follow another man's star; but he had little choice.

Of Quong Yu, proprietor of the Sun and Moon Bazaar, he knew a good deal casually without personal contact. Quong had been born in San Francisco, spoke English almost perfectly, still had interests in the City of the Golden Gate, preferred to live at Suva and had his fingers in the making of many a commercial pie, baked, some of them, as far away as Singapore and Shanghai. Ostensibly he was merely a merchant selling Oriental and South Sea curios; actually he was planter, trader, exporter, dealer in many things which—report said but discovery, never confirmed—included opium.

The message had come to Long with apologies for making an appointment rather than waiting on Long personally.

My body is not moved easily these days (said the note, written in a scholarly hand) and I crave the indulgence of a younger man with a promise that your time shall not be altogether wasted.

A bit florid; perhaps not for an Oriental, Long reflected, deciding that he could afford to let no opportunity go by. Quong would know all about his trying to get a loan; the Chinaman's sources of information were wider and better than those of any European or American.

He walked through to the back of the store preceded by a polite Chinese employee, through the mingled products of China and the South Seas, ivories and native carvings, model canoes, war-clubs, silks, embroideries, *tapa* cloths, mats, fans of sandalwood and palm-leaf weave, calabashes and porcelain, entering to a room where Quong sat in purple-brocaded silk, fat as Billiken, his face like a yellow moon, creased but not lined, with three folds of chin above his pear-shaped body. His tunic was fastened with gold buttons of filigree; the forefinger-nail of each hand was protected by a case of perforated silver; the pipe he laid down had a mouthpiece of jade and a tiny bowl of silver.

A modern steel safe of circular design jarred a little with the imported paneling and furniture of carved teak, the heavy rugs, the hangings, the two doves in a bamboo-pagoda cage and the blossoming bulbs in a green bowl on the table behind which the merchant sat, inviting Long to a chair, asking pardon for not rising.

"I have been expecting you," he said as he clapped his hands with a hollow plop of the fat palms. "I could have told you that

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your island had been swept by the big wave, but I knew that there were survivors and that you would seek them."

He pushed across a box of tea-scented Manila cheroots.

A servant appeared from behind a screen elaborately inlaid with pearl, took the low order in Chinese and reappeared promptly with glasses and a bottle from which Quong filled the former with golden Curaçao. Long drank it with the ceremonial sips that the liqueur deserved.

"The gods love an honorable man," said Quong Yu, "though they may test his strength for advancement. May I ask what you are going to do?"

"Go at it again—from the ground up."

"Ah! In your language you say, 'Fortune favors the brave.' In ours, 'The man who looks upward climbs the best.' Mr. Long, I know all that you have done since you first came to Suva and leased your island. Even your war record. I believed long ago that you were the kind of man I wanted for a certain quest, and I have long hoped that I could secure your services; but I had not learned where the thing I sought was located nor were you free. Now the gods have surely brought things to pass in due order.

"It is within your power," he went on with only the slightest slurring of his rs, "to do me a very great service for which I will pay in proportion. It can be performed only by a man who is brave, honorable, resourceful; who has knowledge of native dialects, and who is willing to take a great hazard for a suitable reward."

"I need money," said Long quietly. "I am not fussy about the risks."

"You will not need your own schooner nor your men," said Quong. "I will secure you a profitable charter for six months. I will engage to pay to whomever you may designate the sum of ten thousand dollars should you fail to return through death. I will pay you the same amount personally if you are successful, and as a bonus I will make over to you my lease on Vana Island with its five-year-old plantations, buildings and other equipment. Or if you return unsuccessful I will give you five thousand dollars. In either event I pay all expenses."

Long's eyes widened at the liberal terms, though, he considered, the sums and the property represented but a small portion of Quong's wealth. But the man placed unlimited confidence in him. Long might make off with this treasure, or he might return and say that he was unsuccessful, pocket the five thousand dollars and still realize on whatever it was that Quong was willing to spend so much to get hold of.

There was a slight gleam in the almond eyes of Quong—eyes that could be as inscrutable between their sleekly hooded lids as orbs of jet.

"I bank upon my judgment of you," he said. "The treasure that you seek is worth much to me; to you it would be worth nothing. I know you for a brave and honorable man. No ordinary messenger would do. I can not go myself for more reasons than the grossness that has overtaken my body.

"You will take your life in your hands, and much of my personal honor depends upon your success. You will have to use your wits; you will have to travel into the bush of Malaita, where few white men have penetrated and fewer have emerged. Some went for gold and found death. My father was killed there on the beach twenty years ago."

Malaita, in the savage Solomons, its misty crags and wild bush inhabited by cannibals and head-hunters! Long had heard the drums booming and the conch-shells booing in the jungle fastnesses on more than one watchful night.

"I have got recruits from the beach there," he said. "I know something of their ways."

And he wondered what the treasure might be for which Quong was willing to risk his money, if Long risked his life, risked torture, the baking-pits, the chance of his head decorating the *hamal* of a savage tribe. Sandalwood or gold it could not be, since Quong declared the thing valueless to Long. Perhaps some magic plant esteemed in the Chinese pharmacopeia, more priceless than crimson ginseng.

"I'll go," he said. "Give me my instructions."

Quong clapped his hands once more, giving singsong instructions to the entering man. Long heard the soft sound of sliding panels; a bolt was shot in the door communicating with the shop.

"We shall not be disturbed," said Quong. "First let us have another sip of this Curaçao."

Long left an hour later, his face grave. It was a strange mission he was undertaking, and to succeed he had to study out

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a plan that would be proof against the hatred of the Malaitan bushmen for a white man, the wiles of wizards, the dangers of jungle trails, the pitfall of the cooking-ovens, treachery, continuous danger.

In his pocket was an advance ample for expenses, to cover all his present indebtedness, a document that was literally an insurance contract.

The last he prepared for the mail to San Francisco, spending a long time writing the letter that accompanied it. Then he acquainted Hansen and Brown with the charter agreements, and last of all he summoned Tikala.

"If you go, Lonogi, I go also," said the Samoan simply at the end of their talk. "We two are a match for many Malaitans."

ARRIVED at Gizo, magisterial and trading station of the Central Solomons, in one of Quong Yu's schooners, Long made certain discreet inquiries about Malaitan affairs. The replies were not reassuring. The Government had stopped the habit of the Malaitans' raiding with their fleets of great war-canoes, boat-built—without outriggers, holding sometimes sixty head-hunting, flesh-seeking warriors; they had burned some of the craft; they had discouraged the killing of white traders; they had even hanged a chief or two; but they had not changed the sinister nature of the native, nor, if they spoke confidentially, did they expect to.

A white man going into the bush was either crazy or determined upon suicide, a bloody death and a most undignified burial in the bellies of the bushmen. The fastnesses of the four-thousand-foot mountains had never been penetrated even by a punitive force. There were canoes still hidden away; sorcerers still held moon-dances, and the drum idols were still smeared with sacrificial human blood.

The belief that the *mana*, the spiritual power of the white man, or of any captive, could be acquired by the eating of certain titbits of his anatomy and the hanging of his head in the village clubhouse was still strong. Neither religion nor the stress of a civilized power could alter the dwarfish blackskins. A good Malaitan was a dead Malaitan; and except for strips of beach the dominion of the British Government—Australian now since the postwar mandate—was only nominal. Such was the state of affairs hinted at if not confessed by the authorities.

None of this was news to Long. But a persistent rumor was more disturbing.

There was a chief named Pana, bearded of face, bloody of mind, who had never been pacified, whose canoes had never been found. His hatred was set against white dominion, his sullen, childish mind resented interference with his capture of women and slaves who might increase his tribe and feed them.

In his mountain village, secure against shelling, there were thousands of skulls that proclaimed his strength; there were prisoners in stockades or even working in the clearings, kept like turkeys against a feast or for occasions of ceremony. Though he might no longer launch his great canoes over rollers of quivering human flesh he could still bury his victims in the foundations of a new house or sacrifice them at the birth or death of a male.

At every full moon the sound of the death-drums reverberated among the sullen, mist-wrapped crags and in the shadowy ravines, the conch-shells booed defiance and the men of the beach shuddered while the traders looked to the magazines of their Winchesters.

In all this Pana was abetted by his half-brother, Kubranga the wizard. There was talk and fear of an outbreak. Restraint chafed their savage lusts. They yearned to make themselves strong, to be free to cruise and burn, capture and fight and kill, to drive the white man into the sea after they had taken due toll of his numbers. Trouble was anticipated by the timorous at the next full moon—trouble now fermenting in the bush, back in the impenetrable tangle.

Dilava was the name of Pana's village. Dilava was the destination of Long, the place of Quong Yu's treasure. Delay would not mend the trouble. The brew was in the blood of the savages. And the moon would be at the full in five nights.

Long bought a second-hand launch, indifferent of model, material and engine but the best available. He and Tikala slipped out of Gizo as they had come, without announcement. He had been in the place before, and nobody wondered particularly about his business, knowing him as a trader. To have told of his quest would have aroused protest that might have resulted in detention.

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He had heard of Pana before, and of Kubranga. It was the wizard who had at one time turned down Long's endeavor to recruit laborers, since Long would not make prepayment in rifles and ammunition. He knew the landing-beach of the tribe, from which a stream ran far back into the island toward the mountains. He had had no trouble with the people of Dilava; but that was only because of special vigilance in the use of a covering boat and positive refusal to permit any natives aboard the *Hope*.

Pana he had not seen. The chief was too dignified to come down to the beach for a recruiter. But Kubranga he remembered very well. A tall man as Malaitans went, well formed, with a hook nose—though it was depressed at the root as were those of all Solomon Islanders—woolly, fawn-colored hair faded by lime paste, and the eyes of a cynical, clever devil, eyes that were alert and mocking and whose glance seemed to hold the essence of every carnal lust and vice and cruelty.

It was with Kubranga that he had to do business. The idea of force was ridiculous. They could not destroy a whole village; nor could they reach the treasure without doing so unless they gained the confidence of the sorcerer. Pana was really a minor consideration.

Mana was the sesame. The psychological beliefs of the Solomon Islanders are based almost entirely on the powers of the ghosts of the dead and of spirits that have never occupied a human form. This supernatural power, acting for good or evil in all kinds of ways, is *mana*. It is an influence manifesting itself as a physical force or in any special power or excellence possessed by a man. It attaches itself also to things such as magic stones, tabu symbols and amulets. All true spirits have it, also the majority of ghosts and some men. It is present in the bones of a dead man even if not in his living body.

The greater the success of a man the greater his *mana*. His influence depends upon his faculty of impressing others with the quality of his *mana*, so making himself chief or wizard. All petitions, propitiations, sacrifices and ceremonial rites are the desire and effort to obtain either *mana* for individuals or its direction for their benefit.

This is fundamental. There is no supreme God among them. There are no idols. The images are merely memorial carvings, uninhabited by spirits. They are only symbols of men with much *mana* who lived under the protection of powerful ghosts.

It is for this reason that the efforts of missionaries have met with scant success among the Solomon Islanders, save as some beach dwellers, living in the vicinity of the missions, have conformed for the sake of certain advantages in the way of food or clothing or on account of a natural pleasure in singing *himinis*.

The idea of an all-powerful God being missing, the suggestion of One Who deliberately sacrificed Himself, Who preached peace on earth and good-will to men, is as foreign to them as the endeavor to make a cat adopt the customs of a dove. The task is made trebly difficult in the fact that the average white man pays no attention to the ritual of the missionary.

The *mana* of the white man is acknowledged as greater than their own. The eating of his eyes, his liver and his heart may convey that *mana*, the protection of his ghost to the devourers. So also wearing of his teeth or knuckle-bones in a necklace, the presence of his skull in the village *hamal* or clubhouse.

Mana was the key that Long meant to employ in the tempting of Kubranga to trade the treasure of Quong Yu for secrets that would endow the wizard with greater influence. Yet this possession of greater power might aggravate the will for revolt and bloodshed. Unless Long could impress the sorcerer with the idea that the white man's *mana* was so supreme that insurrection would be folly, he might as well trade them the rifles he had once refused for fear of the use of them against the men of his own race.

The responsibility weighed heavily upon him.

Then there was the fear of treachery. He knew well the swift revulsions of the savage brain, prompted by primitive appetites, living largely for three things—the fulfilment of the desires of sex and stomach and the spilling of blood, a triumvirate curiously interwoven. Kubranga might accept, might make the trade, with a string attached to the treasure. Securing the *mana* of Long, he might, once Long had departed, believe himself strong to conquer him. The wizard had cunning rather than wisdom. Deception and double-dealing were strong factors in his make-up.

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To deal with him before the madness of the moon dance possessed him was imperative. To gain audience with him was difficult. To wait till the moon dance was over was too great a risk to be considered.

Long knew that anything unknown was considered supernatural, the product of *mana*. Mystery held them. Mystery and a display of power, an apparent acquaintance and intimacy with unseen forces.

Too great a mystery would defeat its own end by the presentation of a secret too obscure for their minds. Manifestation of the invisible, display of matters that would prove him, even to Kubranga, the greater sorcerer, initiation of Kubranga into these mysteries, gifts that would enable him to practise them—these were the matters that Long considered and prepared.

Some things they knew of by contact with the white men. Not many on Malaita; but he had to be careful that his *teriki* (his tricks) were new and spectacular.

The tribe of Pana, like others on the island, always at war with one another for the possession of victims, of women or for the purpose of "making themselves strong," owned a radial strip of land that spread out from the topmost crags down to the beach in a more or less regular wedge with the village near the apex.

Pana's people, being powerful, possessed an exit stream for their canoes. On the beach adjacent to it their women bathed, guarded by tribesmen armed with native weapons and with a few ancient muskets.

This river was the main artery of travel. Elsewhere the bush with its great trees tangled with vines and undergrowth into an impenetrable *chevaux de frise* protected them, its wilderness pierced by a few paths so narrow that the elbows of those passing in single file brushed the dense jungle walls.

Along these paths were signs warning trespassers—grisly piles of skulls and bones, some in hutches or on bamboo poles. There were pitfalls and triggered spears and darts for the enemy and the stranger. The trails ran in a winding maze—only one at a time kept clear of traps as directed by the wizard—leading up to the walled village with its heavy gate, where marksmen watched with their weapons directed with calculated aim upon certain spots.

To penetrate these trails without a trusted guide was foolhardiness. To endeavor to approach the village without being discovered was almost impossible. Warriors lurked in the bush, ambushed themselves in the boughs.

Long knew the location of the stronghold, marked by the white beard of a waterfall, high up the headwaters of the stream. He took counsel with Tikala and decided upon entering the little river at nightfall, working up to a spiny ridge of lava he remembered and so through the long grass of the uplands to a point above the village.

He knew the customs of the tribes; he spoke their language. To appear among them suddenly, to forestall hostility by a startling demonstration, to arouse the curiosity and cupidity of Kubranga—in that lay the only chance of success. The boldness of his unheralded approach would give him an audience—if he could get there unscathed.

The launch held only himself and Tikala. With the patched-up engine sending them along at a little better than six knots they entered a gap in the barrier reef and cruised down the lagoon toward the trading-station of an Australian named Harris, an old-timer in the group, a trader of the old school, a hard-drinking, hard-fisted, fearless man whose immunity from interference had been gained by drastic methods. Twice in the old days his station had been attacked and respect for his prowess attained by his free use of cartridges and dynamite. Bald and fat and nearly sixty, Harris was in many ways an unprincipled but hospitable old scoundrel, and Long knew that any information he might get from him would be authentic, judicious, far more reliable than the rumor-based stories he had gathered in Gizo.

THE bush rose straight from the shallow water's edge, grim and dark, save for the occasional feathery green of vagrant palms. Mangroves had preempted the beach except for rare strips. Jungle scents came off the land—odors of overripe fruit and heavily perfumed flowers. It all suggested swift fruition and decay. There was the cooing of pigeons, the screech of parrots, the even shriller cry of cockatoos. At the mouths of sluggish creeks and estuaries crocodiles slumped into the water. There was no suggestion of smoke, of human habitation. Only a grim loneliness.

The lagoon was shallow, and its floor a water garden covered with coral formations

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in all shades of purple and green, huge sponges and jelly-like lumps among them of brownish pink, club mosses, antlered sea-ferns and schools of scintillating fish in almost metallic coloring of green and blue, crimson and yellow and black; a sea jungle where, for all its beauty, the law was that of the strongest and the swiftest.

Land and water teemed with life and the swift passage of death. In the bush there prowled and watched the dwarfish natives, sooty-brown of skin carrying spear and tomahawk and shield of woven fiber in a wooden frame shaped like a coffin-lid, clad only in a strip of bark cloth about the waist and passed between the legs, greedy, treacherous and sinister, stalkers rather than fighters, eager for the flesh of their fellows. Without doubt the progress of the launch was marked, the news carried by the mysterious island wireless, its destination speculated on, decided. The white man with the big brown man was going to visit Harrisi. What did he have in his canoe?

Their furtive, monkeylike eyes seemed to shift in the yellowish, bloodshot whites; their betel-stained teeth were filed. The anticipatory juices flowed in their mouths at the thought of a smoking pit, of savory flesh; as a boy's mouth waters at the sight of apples.

Soon—so the word had been given out—there would be a great gathering and a mighty slaughter. Feasting and dancing! The white man's possessions would be theirs, his *mana* their *mana* and the wild land their own again!

Their spies swayed hidden in the tops of supple trees and signaled the news.

A visitor for Harrisi. Harrisi, against whom the score was heavy. Harrisi, whose flesh would be no good, tough and salty with age, stringy and sickening to the stomach. But his bleached skull would be a great trophy. His death would provide great sport. The women would see to that. They would keep him alive in a cage and use him for many nights' entertainments.

Kubranga would plait his red beard into his girdle or weave it into his apron where there were many other beards and the hair of virgins, the yellow hair of the wife of the foolish planter, the gray beard of the old missionary. *Eyah!* When the moon was full!

So they watched the puttering progress of the white man's magic canoe that traveled without sail or paddle. Little good that magic of his against the rush of a hundred warriors, firing the stations, dancing in the flames, stamping on the red ashes while their victims were bound. The strong liquors of the traders, the tinned salmon that would be a side dish for the main feast, the gay cloths, the tobacco, the weapons! *Eyah!* And they made the mouthing sign to each other, the deviljsh chop of jaws and the protrusion of their tongues.

Eyah! When the moon was full!

A LONG, incurving reach set with palms showed that they had arrived at the boundaries of Harris' Place. Long looked with the eye of an expert at the plantation of mature trees and, not without a twinge as he thought of Hope Island, estimated the tonnage of copra. There were no new trees. Harris, the sole owner, declared that they would last his time and purposes, while he might not live long enough to see new trees come to nut-bearing.

He was avowedly saving up for one grand jamboree in Australia, where he would show all the friends and playmates of his errant youth how they had underrated him. In that process he proposed to blow himself to the limit, flinging money right and left, flaunting success in the faces of those who had considered him nothing better than a sundowning tramp, rewarding those who had done him little favors, enriching poor relatives, playing the part of a genial jinnee scattering gold. A curious mixture, Harris, living on his beach without the slightest regard for any of the ten commandments, yet resolved to carry out a program that was half mild revenge, half philanthropy.

Long found him on the porch of his bungalow devouring fruit with the manners of a hog, gulping at the acid pulps—oranges, mangos, vis, pineapples—without apparent regard to selection.

"Had one orful time larst night, matey," he said to Long. "Glad to see you back again. 'Ave a drink. Boy, you catch one coconut. Quick. Make it two. Blarst my gizzard, but I've got a thirst.

"Reynolds come over. He's sold out, goin' 'ome to git married, the pore chump, an' let a woman spend wot he ruddy well sweated the life out of 'im to earn. If she'd ever seen 'im first thing this morning she'd call it orf. We wrecked a case of 'Ollands—

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the real stuff; none of your trading-gin.

"Try it; won't 'urt you. I'll join you after a bit. Right now this fruit is all I can stomach. Crave it, an' it soothes the innards. 'Ere's your coconut. Put a slug in it. I'll send a drink down to your man.

"Cheerio. Wot's your lay? Recruiting? If it is you'd better cut it out so far's Malaita's concerned."

Harris swilled his own coconut. Long almost fancied he could hear the cool contents sizzling down the planter's short, hairy neck. Years of the tropics weather had been unable really to tan Harris. He was a red man—red of hair on his skull, where it formed a fringe about a shining island; of beard, of hirsute chest, fingers and wrist. His skin was moistly crimson with heat, the fever of his last night's drinking-bout and natural coloring, and it was spotted with freckles large as confetti.

"Pana's on the warpath, they tell me," said Long. "Or Kubranga is, which is the same thing."

"They're up to mischief, the bloody-minded scalawags. They need a lesson. Too many Bibles an' not enough bullets these days. Slap 'em on the wrist an' say, 'Naughty-naughty' after the damage is done. It's got so they fair 'ate to be mean to a chief. Too bloomin' 'umane they are these days over at Government House. If they kill a few whites an' eat 'em, the Government says, ' 'Ow can you expect 'em to know any better?' If they 'appen to kill a Government man, that's different— 'ang 'im up as an example. But a trader or a missionary—they're supposed to take the risk.

"Drums been booming all this moon. Talk is, the ructions start when it's full. I've 'eard that talk before, but there may be something in it. If they bother me I'll pepper 'em. Down in the labor quarters there's talk of a general rising. They're scared because they know they'll be used for chow. Anyhow if I'd a chance like Reynolds, I'd sell out —— quick.

"It's Kubranga. He's too smart altogether. Too many brains. Too much —— —— ambition. Too much imagination. I know *'im*. Went up to Dilava one time before Kubranga got too cocky. Went to have a powwow with Pana, and you can bet it was well advertised where I was going so that if I didn't come back on schedule they'd know where to look for my 'ead. I didn't take so much of a chance at that.

"I wanted Pana to quit chivvying my laborers. It used to be a pet stunt with 'is men to come down and scare mine when they were working close up to the bush. Make mouths at 'em; you know what I mean—try to stampede 'em. Thought it was fun. It meant tribute from me, so I went up to see Pana and Kubranga.

"I 'ad to stop overnight, and I didn't sleep much. Cost me an old alarm clock for Kubranga, a fake diamond ring for Pana and some salmon, tobacco and dog biscuit. So far they've lived up to the agreement, and I don't like that. If things was normal they'd 'ave been down for more.

"But there was a dance on that night. The singsing ground is off to one side with all the image-drums at the foot of a sort of column. It was the end of a lava flow once, I s'pose, with some blowout where the water worked through and left the end of it cut off from the rest. Must be about eighteen foot square on top.

"There's an old image up there—stone, mind you—something like the ones on Easter Island. Only stone image I've seen in the Solomons of any size. This must be a couple of fathoms high.

"Kubranga claims it's the *netiki* of his great-great-great-gran'father. Told it to himself in a trance prob'ly. Anyway there was the moon shining down at the full; there was the drums boomin', a fire at the top of the column—that's about forty feet high—lit at the foot of the image and Kubranga dancin' stark naked, painted like a zebra. Then he comes down wearin' a cape an' apron of beards an' scalp-hair like they was Summer furs, 'e was that proud of 'em.

"'E put on the dog proper, but 'e fell for the alarm clock. Got it yet if it ain't busted, I'll be bound. Claims it's a ghost box. But I wouldn't go up there again on a bet of fifty quid for every one I'd put up. Hundred to one I'd lose."

"I'm going up there," said Long quietly.

Harris stared at him unbelievingly.

"You ain't turned missionary, have you?" he asked.

"No, it's just a matter of business. There's something up there in Dilava I want to get hold of, that I'm being paid big money to get hold of."

"Got your life insured?"

"For exactly this trip. It's no use trying to persuade me to give it up, Harris. I've

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passed my word, and I need the money.

"I don't mind giving you a hint what it is I'm after. I came to you to find out the real dope on things and to see what you thought about my scheme for handling Kubranga. Maybe you can show me some way of getting there except through the bush. There's a ridge that might be used, I fancy."

Harris shouted for more coconuts, and this time he took a peg of gin in the draft. He seemed to await the shock of liquor on a fruit base doubtfully, but he smiled as his belly warmed.

"Shoot ahead," he said. "You're welcome to all I know."

Long talked for half an hour steadily with Harris nodding approvingly now and then.

"You've got the right idea," he said when Long stopped. "You know 'ow to 'andle natives, and you've got Kubranga sized up dead right. Got to get 'em through superstition—unless they get mad first and then there's one answer—bullets, or a stick or two of explosive.

"By ——, Long, if I was ten years younger I'd go with you for the sport of the thing! I'm too puffy. Climb up there and my 'and 'ud be shakin' like a palm-leaf in a breeze.

"It's chancy, but you may get through. It's coming back you've got to watch, though. And if you should 'appen to make a ghost out of Kubranga, accidental or otherwise, you'll do me and all Malaita a favor. You may convince 'im otherwise, but I wouldn't bank on that.

"I'll be on the lookout for you as you come down. You can keep that as an ace up your sleeve. As to what you're after for that chink I know it's there just where 'e says. I've spoken of it. Might be through me talkin' 'e got 'is information. Not many been up to Dilava—and come back.

"But I never dreamed it was worth tuppence of any man's money, let alone ten thousand dollars. Shows I'm no judge of curios, that's all."

"If Quong Yu thought his news came through you he'd have been glad to pay for it," said Long. "To him it has no set value, you see. He's just got to have it."

"Lucky for you 'e does. And I don't want money. I've got mine. Enough for a flare-up before I'm all burned out and then to buy a pew and pass the plate. You think that's funny, Long, but there's many a worse scamp than me turned churchwarden.

"You'll stay 'ere today and I'll do some piloting for you up Dilava Creek tonight. You might easy take the wrong channel in the mangroves first start off. If I was only five years younger I'd go along, hang me if I wouldn't!" Harris cried, pounding the arm of his chair. "But I'd just 'old you back. 'Ave another drink."

AFTER some trouble in getting the launch over the shallows of the mouth of Dilava Creek, the launch *put-putted* up a channel overhung by a thick mass of mangroves and palmetto scrub, with tangles of water-lilies threatening the screw, with fallen tree-trunks in the ooze to narrow the passage, the moon throwing little splotches of silver here and there through the thick foliage.

High up in the hills they could hear the drums going. That did not necessarily mean more than rehearsals for the moon-dance. When in doubt, dance, is a favorite motto of the Melanesian race.

Nor was there much chance of their being seen. Unless maddened by excitation the native seldom leaves the confines of his own village after dark.

Harris was in the bows of the launch, piloting with the help of a powerful electric torch. Tikala ran the engine, and Long steered. A one-man canoe trailed behind them for Harris' return. The planter had a rifle ready to one hand and a gin-bottle to the other.

Mysterious side inlets revealed that they were penetrating the heart of a large swamp and showed crocodiles waddling, lying prone, swimming off, or sliding down the ooze from fallen trees into the black water. Sometimes the flash of the torch showed their little, malicious eyes watching the intruding craft.

The rotten, sickly stench of mangroves and foul mud pervaded the heavy atmosphere. Sleepy parrots and cockatoos protested murmuringly. There was no movement of the air, and all three sweated as if in a vapor bath. The dull booming of the drums added to the eery nature of the place, harmless though they might be.

Twice they had to retrace their way; but at last there was a distinct current against them, and the air became cooler as it worked down the upper ravine of the creek. At the end of the mangroves Harris slipped into his canoe and bade them good luck and

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good-by. They saw the ray of his torch spraying through the blackness as he deftly paddled his way back to the lagoon, where a five-mile trip awaited him.

It was a sporting thing to do, and Long felt grateful to the old chap, venturing a bad attack of malaria through friendliness and a love of adventure still keen within him.

In the launch Long carried some food and his bag of tricks. Quong Yu had provided him with a casket for the treasure, a cunningly woven thing of rattan, padded with silk and covered with a cleverly arranged tarpaulin that would keep out all dampness, even during immersion.

Long had an old-fashioned wax-cylinder phonograph with him on which he had recorded a ghost message calculated to impress Kubranga and the rest. He dispensed with the amplifying horn.

Then there were rockets, sticks of dynamite, fuse, a burning-glass, some small circular mirrors, extra batteries for the torches, a box of patent trick matches bought by Long for amusement and effect among natives long ago, some lump camphor, a flask of pure alcohol with a little sodium in a vial carefully corked. They carried only automatics. Rifles would be too obvious. The pistols could be concealed.

He depended more upon elaborate details and surprizes than upon the actual nature of his tricks, though they would be effective enough. Some of them Kubranga might be familiar with, such as the nature of alcohol or even the rockets, though these, supplied by Quong Yu, were more elaborate than the run of ship's fireworks. Dynamite also Kubranga knew; but he would be influenced somewhat by the effect of Long's wizardry upon Pana and the tribesmen, as much perhaps as by his own conception of Long's *mana*. That Kubranga would believe Long supernatural was hardly likely, but the audience might.

Quong had also supplied four smoke-pots capable of throwing out a dense fog. With these Long hoped to cover his initial appearance, on which practically all depended. A photographer's flash pistol and some fine but stout silk thread completed the paraphernalia.

All were disposed for easy carriage by the pair. Tikala had been instructed in his rôle, and Long, with the thrill of excitement in his veins, felt confident of gaining the treasure. With Harris he realized the dangers of the return trip.

CLIFFS appeared on either side of the creek. The channel deepened, and the current grew swifter as the bed of the stream narrowed. The moon, close to its full—now two nights off—shone brightly, and they were able to buck through some rapids, make a semi-portage over some shallows and stop only when a tall cascade barred the way.

The launch was carefully hidden in a side tributary, masked with branches bent cunningly down for cover. They stowed their loads and worked up the bank of the creek through a deep ravine to a fall that came spraying down in one sheer leap from a shelf fifty feet above them into a deep pool.

It was a stiff climb to the lip of the fall and the top of the cliffs, the gorge ending, the water winding through heavy bush. A path seemed to run down to the head of the cataract. It did not invite them, and they turned after a breathing-spell to a jungly hill that sloped to the spine of naked lava that had been Long's objective. Walking over the weathered stuff was not easy as they kept to the far side and trailed along the slant of the pitch rather than risk any possibility of being seen.

They reached the grasslands, slippery with long stems of ready growth, an hour after midnight and pressed on to the summit crags. Once when they stopped to get their wind the breeze brought the drumming plainly to them, and they saw a hint of fire reflection to their right.

"The longer they keep that up the later they'll sleep in the morning," Long said to Tikala. "We'll try and work round above them. I want to get a good look at that rock where Kubranga dances and a view of the village. We may see which paths are open."

Tikala grunted. Except when moved to improvisation at a ceremonial feast, he was a man of deeds rather than words. Long was powerfully built, but Tikala was a giant, built in perfect symmetry of great power and endurance and with cool courage. He knew all the risks; but the matter to him was a simple one of going with Long, for good or ill, the expression of a perfect friendship, of adherence until death. He was a living tower of strength, and Long's confidence was bolstered by his companionship.

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The moon sank behind the tortured peaks where the wild goats stared at them from impassable places. Its aura faded out, and the first light of the morning began to make itself manifest as they stared down at last from a rocky pass upon the village where faint embers showed the dying fires in the singsing ground.

The drums had long ceased. Dilava was asleep, tired and gorged. The place was on a terrace cleared from the bush, a flattened oval in shape, walled with stone, set with thatched houses fronted by stilted porches, the long roof of the *hamal*, where the bachelors slept and the men gathered for club-house mysteries, conspicuous with its projecting peak.

Upthrusts of rock, cleft and fissured and caverned, rose on either side of the village above the bush. One of these ended abruptly where a part of it was separated, forming a column, the dancing-place of Kubranga. They could dimly make out the statue on its summit.

"*Tapu* all round there," said Long. "Kubranga gets to it by a plank bridge, I imagine, and he'd keep his people away from seeing how he makes his appearance. But we've got to get a look at it."

Tikala surveyed the ground with practised eyes that could see much hidden to Long. He took the lead, and they plunged down, fighting through the tangle as best they could toward the foot of the abrupt cliff.

It was an old core of lava, seamed by weather, pitted by blowouts of steam and gas. Water had worn through hollow spaces, cutting off the column, but had long since ceased to run. The great pedestal was unclimbable; but they managed the main bulk by perilous work, hauling and hoisting from precarious ledge to ledge until they reached the flattened summit just as the sun rose from the wrinkled sea and turned the gray mists sulfur yellow, tipping the topmost peaks with light.

Long had planned to spend the day there, making his observations, finding out if certain things were practical, watching particularly the course of the strong sunlight. They discovered indifferent shelter and shadow and ate a hearty meal, prepared to broil in a good cause.

Long marked a deep cleft in the column with satisfaction that he tempered until he determined just how the noonday sun would affect it. The village slept on, its details clear as the sun rose and chased the long tree-shadows from the clearing. They could see the gateway built with heavy, sharply staked logs in a high stockade welded to the wall. There was a throwing-platform on each side of it for spearmen.

Tikala pointed out the entrance to bush paths that must lead to the bush. There were four of these, and three of them were marked by a skull suspended from a sapling. The fourth was open. It might be their needed exit. There was no need for the tribe to mask the right path at their own end. Tikala believed the risk might be taken safely.

A little smoke drifted up from the embers of fires in front of the great hollow logs, carven into hideous caricature of humanity, standing in a clump on the singsing ground where the earth was packed flat and dark with the stamp of dancing feet. There was a banyan-tree decorated with skulls strung like onions, swinging slowly in the breeze. More skulls were pyramided in great, ghastly heaps about the outer edge of the grounds.

Long took two circular mirrors, designed for vanity uses, that he had hinged together with adhesive, and handed another pair to Tikala. With these they caught and deflected the rays of the sun and experimented sending darting flashes of light about the clearing. Satisfied, they desisted and waited, sweating in the growing heat, sipping carefully at their canteens.

The sun was only two hours from noon when the first women made their appearance, old hags, most of them, with flaccid breasts, clad only in pieces of bark cloth stretched tightly over the buttocks, rolled up into a bunch in front, kept in position by a string about the waist, some of them with tiny aprons added, some with white stripes on their faces and some with babies carried in a sort of net hammock suspended in front from their necks. The cooking-fires began to glow and smoke; pots were put over them, ovens of steaming yams and taro opened; naked children began to gather round and beg for titbits. The men were still in the huts and the *hamal*.

Long and Tikala took up their mirrors again and began to send will-o'-the-wisp flickerings here and there. It is hard to detect the source of mirror-flashes, and the tribesfolk had no suspicion whence they

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came. The double mirrors helped the deception, sending the flashes at diverging angles.

A child was the first to see them—unterrified, grasping at them for play things with a cry. Then the women stared. The flecks of light went gliding over the grass walls of the huts, darting into the interiors. Now and then one flared into the face of a woman, blinding her so that she screamed and covered her features with her hands.

Long manipulated a beam fair into the small square opening in the front wall of the *hamal*, elsewhere closed by screens and by a wall breast-high over which all those entering had to clamber.

The women were dumfounded. The children caught their fear of the weird flashes that went seeking here and there as if they were spying spirits. Shrill cries went up.

A screen was thrust aside from the *hamal* front, and a man peered out. Long turned a gleam into his eyes, and he shrank back. One more glare floated into the opening above him.

"That will do for a while, Tikala," Long said. "Give 'em something to talk about—keep 'em guessing. They can't see us on the top here. Suppose you see if you can find out the way Kubranga gets up here; there must be an easier trail than the one we took. I imagine he comes here only after dark. Don't want him to find us up here if we can help it.

"If you run across any sort of a cave so much the better. If it gives a view of the village we'll both use it; if not we'll take turns. We won't be able to stand this heat unprotected later in the day."

Tikala went off silently and swiftly, and Long watched the growing commotion in the village. The women had bolted into their huts in a sudden panic, convinced that spirits were abroad, a visitation bad enough at nightfall when it was to be more or less expected, but in broad daylight not to be endured. Some of their men came to the hut doors, and on them Long flashed one swift gleam in the face, sending them to retreat. He was playing for Kubranga to appear, planning not to permit Kubranga to turn the manifestation into something for his own credit as the wily wizard would be likely to do and very capable of doing.

He put down his mirrors, and presently the insatiable curiosity of the natives mastered even superstition and heads began to appear cautiously. From the rock it was laughable to see the town, the red and black woolly pates peep out and dart in again, the owners acting like so many rabbits. It brought a smile to Long, who had a keen sense of humor; but he was in a businesslike mood, going over and over his moves and the possible ones of Kubranga.

It was probable that the wizard would recognize him; but that did not matter very much. Kubranga had asked him for rifles in exchange for recruits and been refused. He had not really expected to get them. If Long had handed them over the native would have laughed at him for a fool to arm black men with the whites' superior weapons.

The women had ventured out again about their fires, driven forth by their lords and masters to get a meal ready and to brave the mysterious flashes. It was far, far better for a woman or two to be blinded or burned than a warrior if there was any supernatural peril.

Long left them alone. The men began to show—married warriors and the bachelor bucks from the *hamal*, yawning and strutting for the benefit of the younger women. Presently they began to question the women about the lights, making fun of them until an elder man or so authoritatively and heatedly described how the witch-light had blinded him. The pantomime needed no words to convey its meaning.

At last a tall, Roman-nosed man came out, his face fresh painted with yellow stripes, bone necklaces round his neck, a sliver of shell through the septum of his nose, a circular disk of shining shell on his breast, insignia that only wizard or chief might wear. It was Kubranga. Pana still slept on somewhere with his wives.

At his gesture the women and some of the men formed a group about the wizard, speaking humbly of their experience. Long waited, his mirrors set for demonstration. He could see the flash of white teeth as Kubranga laughed. In a moment he would tell them that these things were spirits of his control—that it was at his, Kubranga's, bidding——

FULL on the shell disk the reflection glared dazzlingly. Up and on Kubranga's mouth, then fairly in his eyes. The wizard tried to stand it—flung up a forearm—dropped it as Long cut off the flash.

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It was enough. The sorcerer had been disconcerted—almost discredited. To save his face he would be forced to accept the phenomenom as uncanny and go through the mummery of incantation while he cudgeled his wits as to what caused it and explanation he might give, fearful lest it be repeated.

He stalked off with affected dignity back into the *hamal*. Long grinned to himself. The thing was beginning well.

Unless he had fuel stored somewhere, perhaps near his bridge, Kubranga would sooner or later have to come to the column rock with his preparations for the fire to be lighted in front of the stone image that stood with its broad back to Long. Behind this the wizard undoubtedly put on his make-up and costume of a night, preparing his fire so that it would flare up suddenly and reveal him to the crowd below. He was sure that the vicinity was highly *tapu*, almost sure that Kubranga would come after nightfall. Just now he had given the sorcerer something to puzzle over, had upset the equilibrium of his brain.

Kubranga might be less superstitious than the rest because of his intimacy with certain natural phenomena; but like all wizards he undoubtedly believed something of his own mumbo-jumbo, believed that the spells he wove, most of which were handed down through long generations of sorcerers, had something to do with the spirit world.

Long determined to give a series of dancing gleams two or three times during the day. He was especially intent upon the rift at the foot of the column, waiting to see when the sun would strike into it and the exact path of the beam. That would not happen until close to noon.

He meant to stay on the main rock until nightfall, to make his appearance the next morning, to rouse out the natives earlier than their wont, to secure interview with Kubranga and give a demonstration in the *hamal*. The clubhouse had little lighting ordinarily; it could easily be darkened—was undoubtedly whenever Kubranga wanted to give a performance.

Tikala came back with news of a path on the other side that would bring Kubranga up within thirty feet of where they had found shadow. He brought word of a low pit where they could crouch during the worst of the heat and from which they could observe the village enclosure. Long went with him to the place, moving carefully when they neared the edge, carrying their stuff with them.

It was half-past ten. A moment after they were finally disposed in their hide-out a stout figure emerged from a big hut and waddled across to the *hamal*. Without doubt this was Pana. The women called their children away from his shadow; the men showed respect.

Pana was fat. He would be sluggish by nature. Kubranga would have to spur that mass of flesh to action. With the wizard tamed Long did not think that Pana would break out. He viewed the chief's adiposity with considerable satisfaction, and Tikala grunted approval.

"Pana likes women, food and drink better than war," he said. "It is the lean warrior who is restless."

At half-past eleven Long left the gas-pit and got again to the top of the rock with his binoculars, focusing them on the column fissure, watching the nearly vertical course of the overhead sun as it reached down, touched the lip of the fissure, rested on a knobby formation, rayed on into the fissure. He breathed a sigh of relief. His greatest demonstration if Kubranga proved stubborn was feasible.

The enclosure was almost deserted. A few children played in the spots of shade, making dirt pies, throwing sticks in some sort of game. Dogs sprawled or slunk about, snapping at flies, quarreling. Great, gaunt hogs wandered at will, well fed but razor-backed of type.

Once more Long and Tikala sprayed the compound with their goblin gleams, driving the children in howling, scaring the mothers, who peered out to see what was wrong.

It was a full hour before Dilava settled down again, and Long knew that every living being within the village was bothered and perplexed by the spurts of light.

Finally eight men issued from the *hamal* All were armed with spears, tomahawks and shields. Four of them took station on the throwing-platforms at the gate. The other four disappeared down the bush paths.

Long and Tikala decided that owing to there being a general uprising afoot Dilava had not worried about sentinels but that now they were worried by the flashes Pana had sent them out to see what they could see—doubtless unwillingly. As for the

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other four, they were to clear the trails of certain traps and set others, to change the location of the path of safety. When they returned they proved that the conjecture was correct by shifting the position of one of the skulls.

So the village drowsed in the noon heat as all the other bush villages were drowsing, never dreaming of the two strangers crouching in the little volcanic blowout in the *tapu* rock back of the sacred *natiki* image that represented the powerful *mana* of Kubranga's ancient line of witchcraft—according to Kubranga.

The statue, which in Long's idea far antedated the present natives of Malaita, was probably cœval with the strange images on Easter Isle, with the occasional great walls found crumbling here and there in the island groups—cities of refuge, some of them perhaps, fifty feet high, of ponderous masonry ten feet deep to the course. Kubranga had annexed it for his own purposes and in his turn Long intended to use it.

Fortunately for Long and Tikala the cavity the latter had discovered was on the eastern side, and the sun left them in shadow, though the heat was intense. They disposed themselves as well as they could for comfort, but the atmosphere was that of a Turkish bath; the porous, volcanic rock, for all its ancient firing, did not seem to act as a non-conductor. They had little appetite but forced themselves to eat and drink against the next day which was likely to be strenuous.

Usually in a native village the women spend the day in the fields; social life commences only with the lowering of the sun and the temperature. But the dancing, darting lights had upset the program. No women ventured out to the crops under guard, the sentinels drooped on their perch, the dogs scratched themselves and the pigs grunted in their sleep.

As the sun dropped toward the tree-tops a cool breeze came down from the mountains where the mists were forming. The women came out timorously to prepare the second and main meal of the day, though there was generally feasting after the dance.

Long and Tikala crept up to the top of the rock and once more sent out the sun-spots. Once more the women yelled and the men looked out, none too eagerly—seeing nothing, for the mirrors were put away—angrily scolding the women, but evidently fearful and disturbed. Pana kept out of sight and so did Kubranga.

The fires were lit at last, and men began to stroll from house platform to platform, gossiping, discussing. The bucks came out, corseted with belts of bark, ornamented by strips of gay bark cloth in their hair or tucked into their wool or arm ornaments, ogling the girls. Eating commenced in family groups. Women bore food into the houses, though none dared approach the *hamal*. Boys who had just reached puberty and been given the right of the perineal band took bowls into its sacred interior, where Kubranga must be still conjuring, bothering.

It was plain to see that the usual spontaneity had gone out of Dilava affairs. Every now and then the men would glance about them apprehensively as the twilight deepened and the fires strengthened. They were primed for Long's next move. None of them seemed to suspect the *tapu* rock as the source of the flashes, nor thought of them as flashes, as anything but the manifestations of spirits, whether good or evil could not be determined, but probably malicious. There are few good influences in South Sea polytheism.

Long and Tikala crept down the trail the Samoan had located, Tikala ahead, posted to give the alarm, while Long found his fissure, ventured a covert ray of an electric torch and prepared his main argument toward a lasting conviction of Kubranga that the white man's *mana* was a mighty *mana* and could not be lightly provoked.

The moon was rising when they got back to the top of the rock again. They took cover back of the head of the trail. The cooking-fires had burned down, but others were lighted on the singsing ground, throwing the image drums into ruddy relief, tended by young men. The warriors and the women were making up for the dance, daubing themselves in spots and streaks and splashes.

This was the final rehearsal for the moon-dance that was to wind up in a universal raid the next night when the moon sank behind the crags, if rumor was correct, if the excitation of Kubranga and the ambition of the corpulent Pana proved sufficient. There would be a swift signaling of drums and conchs, a wireless understanding, and then the trails would swarm with

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blood-lusting men hurrying down to slaughter, loot and rapine, eager to kill, to gather heads and provide flesh for the ovens—some to attack by sea while others swooped down yelling from the bush in simultaneous, blood-curdling attack.

Kubranga was to be the head and front of this offensive. The mission for the treasure of Quong Yu had widened. The success of Long might avert massacre, and to that end he planned as they sat and watched the gathering files of men and women by the banyan-tree with its grisly decorations, forming up under guidance of the dance-masters.

TIKALA touched him lightly on the arm. The Samoan's quick ears had detected the tread of some one coming up the little trail.

It was Kubranga. They saw his head appear, painted with a broad band of white level with his eyebrows and his lips. A bamboo frame had been fixed to a circlet of plaited bamboo about his forehead. It extended five feet above the wizard's skull-top and was covered with plumes and aigrets that moved in the light breeze. Bone and shell and metal clicked and clinked on his limbs and about his neck. He wore an apron of human hair, and he carried a bowl that gave out a reddish glow, evidently live embers for his fire-making. He had made his toilet in his unholy of unholies in the *hamal*, a recess from which he had emerged in secret.

They could have flung him from the rock, have clubbed him; and for a moment the same thought came to both the watching men. Long dismissed it and detained Tikala by a hand clutch. The big Samoan settled back, but he was like a hound in leash.

For a moment Kubranga stood in the moonlight at full height; then he stooped and fished up from a fissure, covered by a vine, a long pole, notched at intervals—the bridge by which he was to get to the column. He set it in place and crossed nimbly, hidden from the village by the stone image. Then he disappeared about the shadow side of the statue. Almost immediately a bright light sprang up on the far side. The drums began to drone, to acquire resonance slowly; a low chant rose as the files of dancers began to take their place on the singsing ground, the women to one side. There they stood like statues while the great tympani boomed louder and louder until all the air shook with the vibrations.

They watched Kubranga dancing by his *natiki* in the moonlight. Long and Tikala could not see him, but the fire burned on until it was suddenly quenched and the panting figure of the sorcerer came stealing back, over the bridge, replacing the pole in its concealment, down the trail again.

The chant of the men was varied by the shriller voices of the women. Pan-pipes and nose-flutes took higher pitch. The women began to shuffle their feet and the men to stamp in opposing ranks, shaking their spears in regular time toward the moon. The fires flared up as wood and resins were tossed on; imperceptibly the beat of the drums quickened and with it the pulses of the two watchers and the dancers.

The ranks advanced and retreated, formed a circle into which Kubranga came, bent low, skimming over the hard ground, pointing a short spear here and there, stabbing with it at the ground and the sky, brandishing it toward the image on the rock, then at the moon. Voices and instruments had ceased; only the drums stirred up the primitive lusts of the listeners. Centuries seemed to roll back for Long under the hypnosis of the booming. Tikala swayed to the savage rhythm. In the background the women shuffled monotonously.

From behind the drums there came a little company of Kubranga's acolytes, painted like skeletons with white clay on their naked bodies. Each bore a skull on a spear. They formed a circle about Kubranga, who began to whirl like a dervish inside the revolving wheel of his disciples, swirling to the right as he revolved to the left. The chant began again with grunts at regular tempo that increased in vehemence as Kubranga, still whirling, began to leap, higher and higher, his endurance and agility incredible.

The drums stopped. The air still hummed. The men with the skull-tipped spears closed in and crossed their weapons, on which the two on the rock saw Kubranga squatting exhausted as they ran with him behind the fires into the darkness between the drum-logs.

The dance leaders led their files in a savage serpentine in and about the images, leaping over the fires, crimson from their

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light, the high moon shining silver on their sweating skins. The song broke out in a barbaric pæan; the women formed a great circle, slowly shuffling round.

The booming of the hollow logs, the squeal of the pipes, was joined with the harsh booming of conchs as the warriors, mad with excitement, rushed faster and faster until it seemed that human endurance was long past. Following their leaders, a phalanx was formed, charging imaginary enemies. It split and broke up into mimic combats of two, while all the time the women shuffled, shuffled, in their slow, swinging ring.

Then at some signal the women disappeared under the big banyan; the men squatted in double file. Again the drums ceased; something was flung on the fires that made them spurt with colored flame and Kubranga leaped out once more.

Long freed himself from a semi-trance and shook Tikala's shoulders. The Samoan was leaning forward, his face fierce; but it subsided as he turned it toward Long.

"Get the rockets," Long said.

They were set upright in a convenient crevice, the touch-paper was untwisted and Long held a match ready. High and resonant, though piping in the distance, the voice of Kubranga came up to them:

"O men of Dilava,
O warriors of Pana,
Mighty fighters and eaters of flesh!

Eyah!"

The response came as if from one mighty throat, like the hunting howl of a carnivorous beast:

"Marama* rises.

Soon she will be full.
Shall then your bellies be empty?

The white man is few,
Yet would they be the masters
Their *mana* is mighty.
Is it greater than that of Kubranga?

We will steal upon them in the night
With Marama to guide us.
We will strike, we will slay
And return again to Dilava.

But not empty-handed,
O warriors of Pana!
The women will have prepared the ovens,
Shall we have nothing to fill them?

Eyah!"

* The moon.

The gross figure of Pana appeared for the first time, waddling from between the drums, and a great shout went up at sight of him.

"Mighty, oh, mighty is Pana!
Father of many warriors,
Provider for all his children,
Smiter of the white men,
Gatherer of their skulls,
Divider of their bodies,
Apportioning their *mana*.

To all their share
Of the flesh of the white man
Who shall vanish from Malaita;
Of his goods a share,
While his houses shall go up in smoke
As a signal that we have devoured him—
Swallowed him up.
And our bellies shall sound like drums as we smite them,
Swollen with meat,
While the skulls of the white man
Bleach in the sun,
Swing in the wind,
And their *mana*
Enters into the men,
The mighty men of Dilava.

Eyah!"

The squatting figures were swaying in a frenzy as Pana stepped forward to speak.

Long applied his match; the quick-match burned swiftly; the first rocket rose with a hissing roar, arching higher and higher, while Pana watched it slack-jawed, Kubranga craning beside him, the heads of all the villagers twisted upward. Up went the firework, cometing a golden trail. Then it burst into a fountain, a cascade of crimson fire out of which there came, floating slowly downward while the Dilavans crouched terror-stricken, balls of green and blue and white, exploding like aerial bombs as all but the wizard—even the fat chief—flung themselves flat in an ecstasy of dread.

The silence following all the clamor was intense. To the scared natives unseen forces swept through the sky. Kubranga had retreated toward the drums when the second rocket soared and broke into a myriad fiery serpents that came wriggling down.

The warriors began to crawl away on their bellies. Half-way to their huts they got to all fours and sprinted for their lives to the houses and the *hamal*, the women rushing pell-mell after them, Pana himself in undignified retreat.

The dance was over.

Kubranga came slowly out of the shadow

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of the drums, a doughty, savage figure, defiant of the fears that must have possessed him. Long balanced a third rocket on the edge of the rock and fired it. It rushed like a burning lance straight for the singsing ground. It struck about twenty paces from the wizard and tangented, rushing here and there, vomiting molten chemicals, its last dart straight for the banyan-tree, where it exploded.

Kubranga had vanished.

He had challenged the *mana* of the white men. He had vaunted the power of Pana, meaning his own. Was this the answer? It had come from the *tapu* rock, from behind the image he had falsely claimed as the origin of his ghostly attributes.

He entered the *hamal* by his secret way, his spirit dwindling.

The white missionary man claimed that the wrath of the white man's God was terrible when aroused. Surely such things came from the gods.

There was a nightly bowl of *kawa* set in Kubranga's sanctuary, and he sought solace in its potency.

THERE was no need for setting watch and watch between Long and Tikala. Neither of them slept, and dawn was barely suggesting itself when after a final inspection of the fissure they started to half-circle the village enclosure. They had mapped their route from the top of the rock, and they found hog-paths to help them through the thick bush. The sun was hardly up over the tree-tops as they climbed into the boughs of a giant fig that overhung the wall.

Dilava was fast asleep. There had been talk far into the night, and their nerves had jangled before, like so many animals, they had curled up and forgotten their troubles. Some, like Kubranga—Pana one of these—had drunk themselves into semi-stupefaction.

Not even a pig grunted as Long and Tikala dropped to the ground. The dogs barked; but the curs were little good as watch-dogs, howling and yelping among themselves almost continually with their alarms little noted unless they became too disturbing. Long had prepared for them and tossed them broken biscuit that occupied them for a time and puzzled them as to the status of the strangers.

They were a cowardly lot, used to kicks and blows from spears. A raised arm intimidated them. A few sharp commands in the tongue of their masters, spoken low but threateningly, sufficed to disperse them, slinking, after they had bolted the food.

The cooking-fires were built on sand, and there was a stretch of this soft soil in the center of the village, opposite the *hamal* and the main houses, built on the eastern side of the village so that the early sun should not overheat the huts.

Here Long and Tikala swiftly scooped out places for the smoke-bombs, three in front of them in a semicircle, one at the back. Tikala prepared a quarter-stick of dynamite with a plucked-out fringe of fusé, a match stuck into it. He tied a stone to the length of explosive.

Long checked over his equipment. He carefully primed his flash pistol with magnesium powder and nodded at Tikala after a glance at his wrist-watch.

It was a few minutes after seven.

Tikala lighted the smoke-bombs. They sputtered and then began to belch out black smoke that seemed to rise from the ground while it screened the two from the houses and the *hamal*, the fourth bomb helping to envelop them in vapor.

Quong Yu had guaranteed the duration of the bombs, and Long watched the time. There was a chance that he might scare the village too heartily; but he counted upon the confusion of the first awakening to bring them out and the fact that no Melanesian will remain in his house in time of danger, to be speared like a pig or roasted like one.

"All right, Tikala," he said finally.

Tikala lit his match, touched his fuse, actually blew upon it before he hurled the scrap of dynamite far and high, the weight of the stone aiding him for direction and distance. Many a half-stick had Tikala flung into the lagoon for the stunning of fish. He was an expert at the practise.

Just before it touched the ground in its descent the dynamite exploded. Far off as it fell, the blast of air swept aside the heavy smoke-screen for a moment, and the two leaned to the concussion. The skulls in the big banyan went swinging and cracking together on their strings. The dogs fled yipping and the pigs with wild grunts.

The village came pouring out, Pana with them, regardless of royal *tapu* or preference. Kubranga, wakened by the rocking of the

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hamal platform, the swaying of its limber framework, vaguely imagining he heard the sound of rushing waters, dived through the opening in the front wall with the rest and, like the others, stood gazing at the twisting, weaving column of smoke that spouted up as if a volcano had broken out in Dilava.

Even as the fisherman in the tale watched awe-struck the vapor emerging from the jar, so the Dilavans stood, afraid to move, the sound of the mysterious explosion still in their ears, a strange, acrid stink in their nostrils, their memories quick in recollection of the strange lights that had soared about the place the day before, the soaring, hissing flames that had broken up the final rehearsal of the moon-dance.

The smoke-bombs burned down to the powder at their bases and went off in final gusts of belching smoke as Long fired his magnesium, and the dazzling glare showed brilliant amid the vapor, revealing the visitors.

It looked to Dilava as if these men had just come up through the ground—an effect that Long had hoped for. They shrank back; only Pana, dazed and uncertain, and Kubranga, suspicious, none too confident, stayed. Long spoke quickly.

"We have come, O Pana, and thou, O Kubranga; I and my blood brother Tikala have come to make talk with you.

"We have heard of the might of Pana, of the wonders of Kubranga, and we would see them.

"We too can do some wonders. It is in my mind that I should like to behold the marvels of Kubranga that I may tell them to other white men so that they may consider the men of Dilava fairly. It is in my mind also that Kubranga may wish to witness what I may be able to show so that there may be mutual respect for each other and a proper understanding.

"There is a message that I bring to you, though not by my mouth but through the *mana* of the white man. A message from the gods of the white man, who, my spirit tells me, have already visited Dilava.

"Much I may learn from Kubranga. Something he may learn from me. Also I bring him gifts, for I too am *tindalo*."*

He saw recognition beginning to show uncertainly in the narrowed eyes of the wizard, mingled with fear and cunning. Kubranga did not quite believe that this man who had once refused him rifles was anything but flesh and blood.

The appearance had been a trick—a good one, but a trick. It had affected the tribesmen to the extent that Kubranga doubted whether they would stand back of him in an unfriendly demonstration of this fair-speaking stranger who had arrived by magic. He had no doubt about the ability of both Long and Tikala to produce death-dealing weapons at short notice should he himself try to dispose of them; and then—he realized that he was not so sure after all about the trickery—there might be something back of it all.

What had they come here for? What did the white man really want? Could he, Kubranga, deal with him to his own profit? Could he learn how to do these tricks that had sapped the courage out of his people and made even himself a little tremulous?

Cleverer than the rest of them, Kubranga's brain was still incapable of logic. He was still more rather than less a prey to his emotions. There were those strange manifestations of the night previous—the fiery lancing of the third rocket was particularly keen in his recollection. If——

Pana, once a fierce and mighty warrior, now a luxurious fat man, was really only a figurehead, stilted on tales of past prowess, relying more and more upon Kubranga to arrange all his affairs of state. He had been very badly frightened the night before, and this morning's apparition was exceedingly disquieting with the condition of his jumpy nerves and his apparently swollen head.

Kubranga glanced at him, at the cringing crowd about him. Given that same assembly after a dance, worked up by drums and their own chanting, cunningly inflamed by his speech along the lines of least resistance—the avenue leading to the satisfaction of their appetites—and he could do almost anything with them. Now in the early morning, remembering his frustrated program of the night before, the puzzle of the lights, Kubranga was afraid to test them.

Curiosity gripped him.

"Something he may learn from me," the white man had said.

If this was true he might gather secrets that would help him to start the insurrection all over again with the next moon.

It all took but a few seconds. But Long knew that in them he faced the real issue

*Sorcerer.

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of the adventure. His hands were close to the butts of his guns and so were those of Tikala, while he looked calmly into the eyes of Kubranga, a slight smile on his face. He could not follow the actions and reactions of Kubranga's mind, stirred as much by subconscious instinct as by reason, any more than one can tell into what pattern the broken splinters of a kaleidoscope may fall.

"You claim you are a sorcerer because of a little smoke and some fire?" asked Kubranga scornfully.

He could not stand there without reply. It would be remembered afterward. His prestige had to be maintained. He bluffed well, but he could not entirely hide his nervousness from Long. A nerve was twitching in the wizard's throat, and Long breathed a little easier.

"A sorcerer of the sun, Kubranga—not of the moon," said Long meaningly.

"Have you a sign to show the sun is your friend?"

Long had hoped for an opening like this. Kubranga stood with his back to the sun, clear of the long shadow of the *hamal*, his own umbra straggling almost to Long's feet.

"I carry the sun in my hand, Kubranga."

He flashed the round mirror he carried in the palm of his hand fairly in the wizard's eyes so that the latter stepped back dazzled.

"The sun sent messages to the moon last night, up from his sleeping-place. Did you not see them and heed them, Kubranga? They were plain to read. Which do you think is master—sun or moon? Was not one of those messages sent to you direct?

"If you were blind ask those skulls, Kubranga, those that hang in the tree. I think they nod yes, Kubranga."

The grisly relics were still swinging slowly from the blast of dynamite.

"Come into the *hamal*," Kubranga managed.

He was badly demoralized.

"Let us see your wonders," he added.

Now by tribal custom they were guests. As long as the *hamal* sheltered them they were *tâpu*. It was a museum, an assembly hall of trophies, but not a slaughter-house.

They followed Kubranga over the log barrier and through the dim place to the far end, where a fire burned dimly. Light came filtering in through the solitary opening. Long pressed the switch of an electric torch and sent the bright ray searching through the place while the natives—warriors and those who had right of entry—remembering his assertion that he carried the sun in his hand, trailed after in fear.

ON EITHER side of a broad aisle were cubicles containing the weapons and private possessions of the members—spears and shields and a few utensils, ornaments and strips of bark cloth with woven mats. The framework, of stout bamboo fastened together with sennit rope, a few main posts of wood grotesquely carven and painted, served as a gallery for the placement of hundreds of skulls. Swathed mummies pended from the ridgepole. Stuffed images of clay topped by skulls that had been modeled into rude caricatures of the original owners—chiefs of the tribe and famous enemies—stood against the walls.

The farther end was clear save for a screened-off place that was Kubranga's—the master-wizard of the lodge. Here Long duly seated himself, shutting off the torch. Pana and the men ranged themselves before him, timid but curious. Kubranga stood to one side.

In a place of honor Long had seen what he came for—the treasure of Quong Yu. But now that—and the reward—was no longer paramount. His chief idea was to nip the revolt, to convince the tribe of its uselessness, of the sure disaster that would follow.

He took his time, playing for it, making every motion deliberate.

"Put dirt on the fire," he ordered. "Close the opening. Light shows best in darkness."

He was obeyed. Tikala squatted beside him while Long placed his apparatus ready—the camphor, the sodium, the bottle of alcohol and the hornless gramophone on which the wax cylinder was already placed. only the spring had to be released.

He set a powerful torch on each side of him.

"Sit in front of me, Kubranga," he said. "There, by the side of Pana. Bring me two calabashes filled with water."

He switched on one torch, and a youth hurried out with the wooden bowls and returned with them, handing them to Kubranga, who gave them to Long and took his place beside Pana. The place was pitchy dark, musty of smell, eery of atmosphere.

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Long spilled the water from one bowl and poured in his alcohol. He reduced the liquid in the other calabash to the same quantity.

Again he connected batteries and bulbs of the two torches. The light rayed out through the magnifying-lenses. The audience, intent as children but timorous, could see nothing back of the powerful beams.

Long took a box of matches from his pocket and struck one of them, holding it in the palm of his hand. It caused a sensation, but Kubranga spoke.

"Is this magic?" he asked. "I have heard of these things, these fire-sticks. All white men have them."

"Can *you* make them, Kubranga? See, I will show you how they work. But unless I lend you the white man's *mana* they will not work for you."

He struck another and handed it to Tikala and demonstrated with a third. Then he gave the box to the wizard, and the audience craned forward. Long had palmed spare matches. Those in the box were useless.

Kubranga essayed clumsily and the match gave a feeble fizz and died.

"Try another," said Long mockingly.

Kubranga made two more attempts.

"Yet there is nothing wrong with the fire-sticks if you possess the *mana*, Kubranga. Will not the *mana* of your *natiki* aid you? Give me the box again."

In the blackness back of the torches he exchanged boxes, showing the substitute. This he pressed to his forehead and muttered part of the multiplication table in a singsong voice.

"Try now, Kubranga," he said.

The wizard dared not refuse the test. Half-hopefully he struck a match, and it flared up. The spectators indrew their breaths hissingly.

"Keep the fire-sticks, the sun-splinters, O Kubranga," said Long. "I have put my *mana* into them."

Now he had assured the wizard that it was to his interest to be friendly. He had seen the spasmodic delight on Kubranga's face as the match ignited. No one else in the tribe would be allowed to test that box.

He had dropped the trick *tandstickors* into his side pocket and taken out some loose friction matches. One of these he flicked alight with his nail.

"Water quenches fire," he said, as he dropped the blazing stick into the calabash that held the water. But here is a stone."

He showed a bit of camphor the size of a walnut in the ray of a torch.

"Stones sink—but *mana* can make them float. The *mana* of the white man can make them burn on the top of water. Behold."

He ignited the camphor, and it burned with a steady blue flame, drifting here and there as the slight force of ignition gave it effort and motion. This was enchantment. All eyes were fixed upon it.

Long, sure that his hands were dry, shook out a scrap of sodium, tucking it between his fingers as he pushed out the second calabash so that it could be seen between the torches. He stretched out his hand, turned it, palm up, then down.

"I hold the sun in my hand," he said solemnly. "The sun-splinters are for those white men who are not wizards. But I, a wizard, do not need them. Behold!"

He slightly opened his fingers, and the morsel of sodium dropped unseen into the alcohol, which instantly flared, seemed to crackle and burned in ghostly blue. Long switched off the torches. The lighted alcohol was sufficient. It brought his face and throat out weirdly. He knew that Kubranga, throwing himself into a seeming trance, could produce a ventriloquial voice in darkness that he claimed was the voice of a spirit, and he wanted to offset the wizard's thought that what was to follow might be a duplication of the trick, common to all sorcerers. It could not be done without some slight motion of throat or distortion of the lips. The phonograph was back of him, Tikala ready to operate it.

"My spirit tells me," he said, "that when the moon is full tonight many things have been planned. Now listen to my spirit, which lives in the sun and speaks with the voice of the sun. Listen and take heed."

A tremor ran through the *hamal*. Kubranga leaned forward, intently studying the face of Long. The alcohol burned blue; the camphor sputtered with a greenish flame.

Then a voice intoned, coming as if from far away, faint but distinct, ghostly, speaking their own language.

"This is the voice of the sun,
From whom comes light and life,
From whom comes warmth.
The moon is mine enemy
That I have weakened

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So that the Night devours her.
Slowly she is eaten.
Her pale light, that has no warmth, grows less
As the night swallows her.
And the moon is no more seen
Until night vomits her again.
Pale and cold and weak is the moon.

Does my shape change?
Do I cease to shine?

Listen to the voice of the sun.
Listen to my warning,
Lest I give orders and the moon shines no more,
Lest you spend your nights in darkness.

Lo, I have given my *mana* to the white men.
They carry me in their hands.
Theirs is my strength, eternal.

Beware! Leave them in peace,
As they leave you.
Rise, and I shall arise
And fight with them against you—
Fight you with fire and flame,
Placed in the hands of my children.
The white men—the sons of the sun.

Dilava shall lie in ashes. The men of Dilava
Shall mingle their ashes together.
Their spirits shall roam in the darkness.
For I know well their plots,
The foolish desires of their hearts.
Obey, or I will destroy you.
Dilava will be a waste,
A place of silence and horror,
Not even a child left to cry
In the ashes that once were its parents.

This is the voice of the Sun.
I have spoken!

The record was ended. Tikala stopped the spring. A low groan went up from the audience while the alcohol flames lit up the still, grave face of Long.

"You have heard," he said. "I have shown you a little of the *mana* of the white men. They know of your plans, and they are ready to meet them. The great guns of the ship that is built of iron will spew out fire upon you.

"But I bring a message of peace. I bring gifts of knowledge to Kubranga that he may learn something of our wisdom. I ask you for a token to take back to the white men so that you will not be blasted, burned to ashes, so that your ghosts will not wander for ever in the uttermost darkness, your name forgotten and your *mana* be lost for ever.

"Sons of the sun are we, and we wish you no harm. Little by little you can learn the ways of the white man and possess his *mana*. This is the will of the high gods, that all men live in peace. Will you challenge it?"

Pana spoke, his voice gruff, striving for steadiness.

"What is the token you ask for?"

"That I will tell Kubranga. It is a thing that does not belong to the men of Dilava. Give it me and there will be peace."

"What if we give you nothing? What if you do not return from Dilava?"

"Try and see, O Pana. I have shown you some things. Perhaps there are more. What says Kubranga?"

"Your spirit has spoken. Now let me speak with mine."

Long took this for a hint at possible understanding.

"Then let the rest depart," he said. "Let wizard talk with wizard. Our bellies are empty. Let us eat, that our minds may be stronger."

He sensed victory. For the time. Despite what he might give to the wizard, impart to him, he had humbled him, and he knew that Kubranga would not forget. He knew that the primitive minds of the savages would rebound after the spell had passed.

Kubranga knew that the tribe was convinced of the stranger's supernatural powers, but Kubranga himself might not be. He might merely consider Long a cleverer wizard than he was. Jealousy might conspire with revenge. The triumph might be only transitory.

The *hamal* cleared swiftly, the men trooping gladly out into the light of day, though many of them looked with fresh awe and wonder at the sun. The sounds and smells of the preparation of a feast commenced.

Long looked at his watch. It was nine o'clock. He capped the burning alcohol with the other calabash, extinguished the burning camphor. Denied air, the alcohol flame died instantly.

"Will you give me the stone that floats and burns?" asked Kubranga. "Will you show me how to light the water?"

"Surely. Dry your hand, Kubranga. Here is sun-dust.

He shook out a scrap of sodium.

"Drop it into the water."

The wizard did so, starting slightly as the chemical broke into flame. Long gave him the bottle.

"Keep it from water, Kubranga, for it

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hates it. Here is the burning stone. This in the other calabash is charmed water. Be sparing of it. You can light it with a sun-splinter. When these are gone, if there is peace between us, I will see that you get more. Every three moons from Harrisi."

"What do you want in exchange? What token?"

"I will show you."

Long turned a torch-ray on the treasure of Quong Yu. The face of the wizard grew sullen.

"No," he said, and his jaws closed on the word like a trap.

"Think it over, Kubranga. Tell me after the feast. Keep the things I have given you, but remember I can take their *mana* away again. Look, Kubranga. This too I will give you if you let me have the token that makes peace between us. The sun lives in this."

He shut off the torch and put it in the wizard's hand. The daylight again came in dimly through the opening, and Kubranga's face was a study in covetousness. He fumbled with the torch.

"It needs *mana*."

Long placed his hand above the wizard's, manipulating the switch on and off. It would be a priceless treasure to a native sorcerer. It would make Kubranga the greatest of all wizards.

"I have brought a basket for the token, Kubranga," he said. "I will leave it with you. If you bring it to me filled after the feast I will leave my *mana* in this sun-stick and give you the secret of making it shine. And if the light grows pale because your heart is not always strong toward the white man, then if you change again toward friendship Harrisi will restore it. But if there is treachery in your heart the sun will know and Harrisi will know also. Speak with your spirits, Kubranga. I go to the feast."

He went out with Tikala, leaving the wizard inside alone. It was plain that the treasure of Quong Yu was regarded as a powerful fetish, that Kubranga, if he did not greatly fear the loss of it on his own account, believed that he would be hard put to it to explain its loss to the tribe. It would be a manifest sign of his weakness. The torch and the other gifts might offset it.

If not, Long had one card to play. It had to be played in any event. If after his successful departure, it would have its effect as an after-warning. If Kubranga still proved stubborn Long believed it would win the game.

The gluttonous feast proceeded, with scraps thrown to the dogs and the too intimate pigs. It was a bestial sort of orgy with Pana stuffing himself until he was dragged aside and massaged, then, relieved, loaded his great belly once again. He pressed titbits on Long and Tikala that could not be refused.

The flies gathered in clouds, and the sun shone hotly down on the guzzling, greasy crowd. It was a long ordeal, but Long had counted on it, knowing native ways. The hands of his watch crept round to eleven, to the half-hour, the three-quarters; and Kubranga still sulked in the *hamal*.

They were stuffed to repletion at length, and the suddy *kawa* went round. Still the wizard did not come. Long rose.

"The sun is high," he announced. "I must have my answer."

The faces of the satiated warriors changed. They had forgotten things in the cramming of their stomachs. Pana blinked and gave an order, puffingly. A man went toward the *hamal* and called the wizard's name.

Kubranga came out empty-handed. Long's face grew stern. He glanced at his watch. Four minutes to the hour.

"Where is the token, Kubranga?" he demanded.

"My spirit says that it is not wise to deliver it to this white man," said the wizard.

His face was stony, representative of his hardened spirit. The warriors looked at each other askance. With their sorcerer's boldness confidence began to come back to them. They glanced at Long sidewise. He was but one man among many. Had Kubranga stolen his secrets?

"Your spirit that dwells in the *natiki*, Kubranga? The ghost of your ancestor?"

"Yes," answered the wizard boldly.

There was no other answer.

"Ah!" said Long with a smile. "Now it is in my mind that you have spoken falsely, Kubranga. For my spirit, which is of the sun and sees all things, tells me that the *natiki* is not your *natiki*. That your spirit does not live there at all."

Kubranga's dark face turned darker. The very core of his supremacy was threatened. Some of the warriors were on their

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feet with Pana, their gaze hard on the presumptuous white man, turning to Kubranga, expecting an instant reply, some crowning act of wizardry that would crush the challenger.

Long threw up an arm to the sun.

"We shall see!" he cried. "Let the sun answer!"

They waited while the second hand of Long's watch seemed to crawl. He knew that the almost vertical shafts must be close to the burning-glass he had fixed so carefully by the fissure, trained to direct the strong, concentrated rays to the quick-fuse that led to the dynamite he had placed there—all he had brought, except the quarter-stick used by Tikala.

He was sure of his preparations. The time might vary a few seconds—but——

THERE was a sullen roar, swiftly multiplied by the echoes into a roll of thunder. A flare of pale flame among the trees. Fragments flung upward in a fine mist of gray vapor. The *natiki* rocking, the lava column swaying, toppling, crashing down, the image shattering at its broken base!

The faces of the warriors were gray with fright; their eyeballs projected from their sockets. The great frame of Pana trembled in apprehension.

Kubranga gave Long the look of a baffled devil.

"The sun has spoken," said Long. "Shall I ask it to speak again?"

A chorus of gutturals broke out from the frightened men. Kubranga strode to the *hamal*, vaulted the barrier and emerged with the basket.

"Take it and go," he said.

Long looked inside at the treasure of Quong Yu, safe in its padded receptacle. He gave Kubranga the torch, and the wizard flung it to the ground. Long walked with Tikala slowly toward the gate. A babel broke out behind them.

"Don't hurry, Tikala," he said, "until we get outside. Then we won't waste any time."

Tikala's face was grim.

"If they come after us," he said, "some of them will not return. It is a pity we have no more dynamite."

"Risky stuff to carry in this climate. And I had to make sure of the job."

They were at the gate when Kubranga's voice broke out in a passionate harangue.

"He's telling them we've stolen the honor of the tribe," said Long. "It's the most valuable of their possessions. He'll put up a good talk or he'll lose out for keeps. Hear that?"

The warriors had answered Kubranga with an approving shout.

"If he is a god," cried Kubranga, "a spear will not hurt him. If he is a god, why did he eat like a man? He has used the white man's tricks, but I can use them also. I have stolen his brains. Let us spill his *mana* with his blood, and drink it."

His voice died away as Long and Tikala plunged into the one safe trail, moving at a wolf lope. The treasure was bulky rather than heavy, and Long tucked it under one arm like a football.

"They'll know the traps. One of the trails may be a short-cut," he said. "I'll feel safer in the launch."

Tikala nodded.

"I do not like to run," he said. "But this time it is better. I think they are coming."

Faint shouts reached them and ended suddenly. Tikala stopped and put his ear to the hard trail.

"They are running fast," he said. "Many of them."

KUBRANGA was desperate, using his oratory, his long-established influence, to offset the degradation of his *natiki*, the triumph of the white man, his own diminishment. Later he would find an argument to twist about the fall of the stone image; now he must put it out of their heads, fill them with the picture of a primitive appeal. He could do it with a supreme effort, he told himself, despising them for shallow brains.

The one thing to do was to overtake Long, to bring back the token, the value of which he stressed, blaming the tribesmen for having forced him to give it to Long. Only with the bloody head of Long upon a spear, his body in the baking-oven, the token restored to the *hamal*, could Kubranga fully regain his prestige.

He was a spellbinder in words as well as by conjuration of spirits and by tricks. His voice, cunningly cadenced, carefully marking each climax of some allusion that roused their passions, fanned up their rage to a roaring flame.

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"Are you no longer men?" he cried. "Has this white man withered your arms or dulled the edges of your spears? Shall it be said that he makes a mock of us, showing this token that he has taken—though I would have refused it—did refuse it—showing it everywhere until the sound of the laughter that is roused against us shakes the forest?

"He is big with words, this white thief of our honor. Let us see if his flesh is so tough that your spears will not pierce it, that your teeth can not tear it. He threatens us with destruction. Let us make a test of it, for now we are dishonored. Let us die—if we must die—with weapons in our hands, red with the blood of the white man.

"But we shall not die. For years you have listened to me, Kubranga. Have I spoken you false? Have not your wives borne many children, the crops been plentiful and your enemies humbled? Now will you turn against me to listen to the mouthing of a stranger?

"Shake your spears, men of Dilava! See, where Pana stands ready to lead you. Make ready the ovens, women; we go to bring back meat!"

He played on the emotions of the mob as skilfully as an organist manipulates his stops and pedals. From their throats came a roar as they rushed for their weapons. A youth brought Kubranga a tomahawk made from a trade ax, set on a long handle and honed to razor sharpness. Half-fuddled and yet stimulated by the *kawa*, and the stirring, scourging words of the wizard, Pana, like the rest, gripped shield and ax and spears. Kubranga led them once swiftly about the enclosure, leaping high, bending in his spring to tap the ground with his weapon before he straightened out galvanically and yelled aloud, his head flung back, howling the blood-call like a wolf.

They rushed in a wild horde out of the gate, seeing, smelling, hearing that the two they hunted had gone down the safety path. Kubranga's eyes glowed at this, burning like the alcohol in the calabash.

Long and Tikala could no more deviate from that close-set jungle trail than sheep traveling between high hurdles. It led to the river, down close to where the great war-canoe of Pana had been hidden when the edict had been given out to destroy such craft.

Secretly the canoe had been overhauled, furbished, calked and revarnished with the lacker juice of the *totui-nut*. It was ready to launch that night. And the other paths led to masked short-cuts and byways. They would surely bring home the meat.

The shallow celebrations of the tribesmen, almost as incapable of true memory as baboons, were already bereft of the impressions made by Long's wizardry. Its effect had been that of the moment, of actual demonstration. In its place was now the suggestion of Kubranga, that the *hamal* had been robbed of its chief adornment, that the white man had made a mock of them, that there was killing forward, the sight and smell of scarlet blood, the butchering, the head trophy, the odor of the baking-ovens, feasting, drinking, a wild orgy!

Blood!

They ululated the word: *"Totol To-tol To-to-to-tol"* as they raced down the trails, Kubranga ahead of one file, Pana of the other, the chief's gross body shaking but his great thews hurling him along.

Ta toto papalangil The blood of the white man!

TIKALA heard the sound of the running feet that first followed and and now began to catch up with them, traveling almost parallel. And he guessed the reason, knowing also by his sense of direction that the trail they were on led to the river. It might come out by the first cascade that had halted them, at the foot of which they had left the launch concealed. It might be at the top of the big fall. He had noticed trail-openings in both places when they came in.

These other trails, along which the pursuit was following fast, would all give to the river within a short stretch. That meant a canoe:

He looked over his shoulder at Long and jerked his head, mending his pace. They ran free from the hips, at full stride, the hot air feeding their lungs painfully, Long drenched in sweat, Tikala's golden-brown body dark with streaks of it, smoking with evaporation.

Almost up with them, they heard the tribesmen give tongue.

"Totol Ta toto papalangil"

They were exultant howls, holding the note of the hunting-hound that smells the scent intoxicatingly in its nostrils.

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Long was in fine condition, and he pressed Tikala. There was no breath to waste for words, but the two let out their last link. Tikala had an automatic in each hand, gripping the butts as a runner grips his corks. Long carried only one, his left arm wrapped about the precious casket.

They covered the ground in great strides, spurred by the unseen, yelling files that raced with them—to the death.

The sound of falling water came like a muttering thunder. Little puffs of cool, sweet air came down the trail, gracious as cold water to a parched throat as they sucked it in, going at top speed. To their right the pursuit had veered off a little; to their left it seemed to be closing in. Clambering down the rocky pass to the pool below the fall, they must inevitably be pierced through and through, slashed to pieces, pounded by flung rocks. To stand was folly. The rest of the tribesmen were bound to cut them off lower down if they delayed.

There would be no time to reload, to shove in fresh clips in the open.

Tikala flung a word at Long—

*"Vailaol"**

Long understood. It was a desperate chance without selected take-off or landing. But it was the only one.

They emerged on a series of rock ledges, over which the fall gushed green in the sunlight, spouting to the eddying pool fifty feet below. The pool might be deep or shallow. Here and there rocks jutted up; masses of white foam went rafting here and there.

One glimpse of it was all they got, one swift vista of the stream tearing to the sea between cliffs and trees. Then a spear came flashing between them out of the upper trail amid an excited hubbub of joyous howling.

"Give me the basket," said Tikala, tucking his pistols away in his belt. Long gave it to him. He was a good swimmer, but Tikala was nearer fish than man in the water.

Following the Samoan, Long strode out into the ropy water that tugged fiercely at him half-calf deep as it flowed over the slippery rocks. More spears came flickering; a tomahawk whizzed by his ear and barely missed Tikala, who that moment squatted on the verge of the fall and went slithering down feet first, body held straight, like a log that had shot the rapids.

Long had his one gun still out. He whirled to fire a discouraging shot or two. A hit right now might mean an effectual check. Perhaps he could pot Kubranga. But with his finger still on the trigger his foot slipped and he went reeling over the edge, falling more like a dummy than a living man, off balance, off control, down to the swirling, glinting water that seemed to rise to meet him like a great wave.

He had a swift revision of the vaulting of the reef at Hope Island, the breaking oar, the desperate fight with his steering-blade—then he struck the pool, and it engulfed him, going far, far down until his chest seemed to be crushing in his lungs, tortured for lack of air.

A strong arm, steadying his limpness, bearing him up. A gush of air, deep to his lungs. Tikala's face beside him as the Samoan churned his way across the pool, towing Long until the latter's strength returned and he stroked with him though Tikala did not let go of him.

Spears were falling, stones splashing about them. Natives were coming down the fall, swimming after them. Pana's great body stood shining in the sun for a moment, then came tobogganing down the water-chute.

Long's knees struck bottom. Tikala gave him a hand beneath his elbow. He did not need it. His lungs were full again. A spear grazed his shoulder as he bolted with the Samoan for the lower cataract, at the foot of which the launch was concealed, expecting every moment to see the second file of tribesmen ranged against them, catching them between two fires.

He barely felt the cut, though the blood spouted and dripped on the rocks and boulders while the chasing cannibals gave new tongue to their delight at the sight of what they were after.

"Ta lolo papalangi!"

The man who had speared him stopped, lapped up the salty drops and sprang ahead charged with new energy and ambition. He took a second spear and made his throwing-stance, left arm forward, the right drawn back, the shaft clutched in his fingers ready for delivery.

Tikala cried warning for Long to dodge, but Long took snapshot aim; the bullet crashed in under the eye, and the exultant warrior fell, tripping the next, halting the

*The water road.

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rush a little at the sight of two men down at one shot. They waited too for Pana to catch up with them, too heavy of body, still too recently fed longer to set the pace.

The foot of the lower cascade reached in scrambling leaps, Long managed breath enough to gasp to Tikala, while he leaned with one arm against the cliff, his heart pounding, a little giddy from superexertion:

"Get out—launch. I'll—hold 'em off. Never mind—engine. Current'll do at first. I'll take—basket."

If only Tikala could get the launch out into the stream before the rest of the tribesmen showed up! Were they lurking in ambush—or——?

Long fired at a head that peered down at him from above. His aim was none too steady with the blood pounding in his pulses after the rough race and the last clamber; but the bullet hit rock and splintered it, stunning the man, who came smashing down, thudding senseless and bleeding at his feet.

Now Long knew that Kubranga was not in the immediate pursuit. If he was with the other part of it, it was because he believed it the surer of the two to overtake them. There was no use in bothering about that.

The nose of the launch was poking out from the little tributary as Tikala shoved it from cover. Back and above them natives dodged, flinging their weapons with hasty aim, fearful of the white man's gun. Long waded out into the stream and vaulted the gunwale as he gave the launch a final straightening into the current.

Tikala took the wheel as Long threw on his battery and spun the heavy fly-wheel. There was a protesting cough, a spit, and on the second spin the engine broke into exultant life.

Pit - pit - pit - pit - patter - putter - patter - putter - put - put - put - put.

It was a cheery song, and Long grinned as he listened to it, though the front of him was red with blood from the gash in his shoulder, pooling on the floor of the launch. With screw and current they were going fast. There were only the shallows lower down to bother about. If the tide——?

The tide would be turning to ebb. They would have hard work to scrape through.

Tikala clucked.

"*Motu*,"* he said briefly as Long came out from under the engine-hood.

* Canoe.

Their late assailants were falling behind. It was hard going along the banks. But just ahead there was commotion. A bushy screen, interwoven by vines, their tough tendrils of several seasons' growth, was being torn down by figures back of the masking.

Already the elongated stem of a Malaitan war-canoe showed, set with cowrie-shells, inlaid with shell, carved, and decked with feathers. The launch raced toward it, and Long emptied both his pistols as they passed. Howls of rage witnessed that he had not entirely missed.

The last of the tangled screen gave way, chopped apart, and the great canoe swung out behind the launch, men alongside of it thrusting with their shoulders, their bodies submerged, heaving with frantic effort as they saw the white man glide ahead. Others thrust the paddles with their crescented handles deep into the foaming water. A flight of spears, blades and polished shafts gleaming, fell all about and in the launch.

The native is a surprizingly, but notoriously, poor marksman with his own weapons. He kills best with a club or blade from ambush; most of his wounds are taken or delivered at close quarters. Neither of the fugitives was hit.

Tikala fired his clips while Long reloaded, first his own and then the Samoan's guns. There was going to be trouble before they got through.

The war-canoe, forty paddles sending it surging along, shallower of draft than the launch, of far better lines, was making equal speed. It had not waited to take aboard Pana or any of his immediate following. Kubranga stood in the bows, his eyes burning with hate and hope of revenge, his voice leading the chant that timed the paddlers and sustained their frenzy.

If the engine faltered—and it was quite capable of breaking down at any moment—the canoe would forge alongside with two-score men swarming aboard. Some would die; but neither Long nor Tikala could survive.

Tikala steered, squatting low to lessen a target for chance spears, though none were flung. Kubranga seemed certain of overhauling them. Long coaxed the engine, tinkering with it, praying to it as it labored along.

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The war-canoe with its snaky neck like a viking's dragon craft, came leaping, lunging on. Kubranga quickened his chant, and it gained. He had not counted on Long having ascended the river so far in his launch.

They had almost been too late. But not now. In the sluggish reaches where the stream spread wide in the mangroves, where the full force of the current would no longer favor the launch, the canoe could soon overhaul them. Before, perhaps.

A bullet came buzzing, stinging back. A big cowrie deflected it, though the shell was smashed. The high, protected prow shielded Kubranga efficiently. It was not easy shooting with the launch, spurred by the screw, sped by the swirling current of ever changing depth and speed, rocking and bucking. But the great canoe crept up foot by foot, and——

Long's fifth shot slapped into the chest of a starboard paddler, where he dug side by side with his fellow on the narrow thwart. The slug went in below his nipple and smashed his spine, and he slumped forward at Kubranga's feet, the lively canoe swerving, bumping against a boulder before the steerer could check it.

There was no man to take the paddler's place, and his death put two instead of one out of commission. The canoe was built to hold sixty paddlers. If it had been fully manned it would, driving at top speed, have overtaken the launch. Lighter now, it was less manageable in the white water.

Solomon Island canoes have no outriggers; the craftsmen who build the boats learned their art elsewhere than from the other island tribes of the Pacific. The canoes are tender of control, though not cranky, and in turbulent water going fast, their great length runs them into trouble quickly. It took time and strenuous effort to get the canoe going again at its former clip, and the launch got back its lead.

They rounded a bend and reached the place where gravel spits almost barred the way. It was vital that they get across the first of these obstacles before the canoe caught up with them, wading thigh deep, tugging and shoving the launch through. If the canoe was shallow enough to cross the bars the game was over—lost.

Speculation was smothered in action. The stem of the launch crunched into the gravel, and the boat shuddered, slowed as they leaped out, lifting, heaving, forcing it to deeper water. On came the great canoe and halted with a foaming backwash of paddles. The tribesmen sprang overside as the launch sped on to the next obstruction and worked madly to pass the shoal.

They got through without loss or gain to race wildly down white rapids. Tikala had the wheel again while Long looked out for the worst of the rocks, ready to sheer off if possible, warning the Samoan when a jagged fang showed in a spout of spray. It had been easier work, if slower, bucking the rapids on the way up. Long had managed to bandage his shoulder, but he had lost a lot of blood and felt the drain on his strength. He could only shoot one-handed now, had only one arm to fight with at the last.

They entered the mangroves, and the marks of slacking tide were plain. Behind them the chant in the canoe became louder, more confident. The engine began to falter, overheated, and Long monkeyed desperately with the spark, with the mixture, fearing each second that the pulse of the machine would quit.

At last they came into what Long fancied was the final channel leading to the lagoon. The black water gave little indication of its depth, but he could see that they were stirring up the mud. The chant had given way to yelps of triumph, timing each stroke.

Ahead the channel curved between the gnarled mangroves. The low roar of the surf on the barrier reef made itself heard now and then.

Slowly and sickeningly they slackened speed, the bows lifting a little as the launch plugged into an underwater hurdle of mud. The screw thrashed wildly. To go overboard in the ooze, fathoms deep, worse than quicksand, was impossible.

Long swiftly undid the tarpaulin of the basket. When the canoe came alongside he resolved to toss the token away into the water. Quong would prefer it that way, and he would foil the exultant devils of that victory. All left after that was to take as many with them into death as possible before they went down, fighting.

Tikala's deep voice sounded. He was singing his death-chant, his eyes flaming. The Samoan was not much of a shot; he would fire his guns quickly, then take to the pike-pole Long had used for fending off, until he could wrest a tomahawk from an enemy.

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"I go into the darkness,
But not alone,"

he sang in his sonorous baritone.

"Lonogi fights with me—
Lonogi, my brother,
Whose blood is my blood,
Whose name is my name;
Lonogi the wizard,
Who made a mock of Kubranga.
We go through the gate together."

He stopped. The canoe was not thirty yards away.

"*Talofah, Lonogi!*" he said. "It will be a good fight."

Long opened fire, pitifully ineffective even if every bullet killed a man. With the muddy water curling about its stem the canoe surged toward them. Half the warriors had dropped their blades and were standing up with their spears and axes ready for a bloody boarding, the craft gliding fast under the last impetus of their strokes, the final efforts of the stern paddlers.

Twenty yards!

Long aimed again and again at Kubranga, but the wizard seemed to have put a charm on his life. A man fell back of him. Spears began to fly, sticking in the woodwork of the stranded launch.

Facing the shouting tribesmen, their features grim, Long and Tikala saw nothing, hardly noticed the bark of a rifle that sent a slug through two warriors as the shallow-bottomed copra-launch of Harris forged alongside, the old planter in the bows, three of his men with him, firing Winchesters, another steering.

Something like a stick showed in Harris' right hand, a stick that threw off sparks and went whirling through the air to strike the water at the stem of the canoe, water that suddenly geysered up while the roar of dynamite thundered through the mangroves.

The concussion almost flung Long from his feet. He saw the broken canoe flung asunder, black figures hurled here and there, shrieks of terror mingled in a common death-cry and a second half-stick letting loose its concentrated destruction as the copra-launch swerved violently off into the mangroves to avoid running into the catastrophe it had brought about.

The chase was over. Bits of the canoe fell and floated. Broken men swam feebly for the mangrove-roots. Smears of blood streaked the water, signaling the crocodiles to the feast.

"THEY'LL be'ave 'emselves after this," said Harris, tilting his bottle over his glass. "It's a good thing Kubranga was along. I've been wanting an excuse to get a crack at 'im for a long time. Made 'ash of 'im. 'Ash on toast for the crocs' supper.

"I 'eard that blast up in the 'ills at noon, and I figgered you'd be along and might need a bit of 'elp. Told you I'd be lookin' out for you. But I 'ad trouble with the launch. Punk batteries. Close call at that."

Long, new-bandaged, bathed, freshly clothed, a tot of good liquor offsetting the faintness from his loss of blood, nodded gratefully.

"You bet," he said. "I could see my head stuck up in the *hamal*. I didn't mind that so much as furnishing a meal for those ——s. It was touch and go. But we've taught them a lesson. At least you have. They had forgotten mine. Kubranga had Bryan stopped a mile as an orator. It's always the last speaker with natives."

"You won out with what you went after."

Harris opened the basket and gingerly took out the treasure of Quong Yu.

"No accounting for tastes," he said. "Two thousand quid and a plantation chucked in for this. Old Quong is fat enough, more ways than one; but I wouldn't give a tin shillin' for it. I'll run you over to Gizo termorrer. I ain't goin' to report this thing. Only tie you up. When the news works in to 'em they'll come to me and I'll tell 'em they made an attack. The canoe puts 'em in wrong. We won't get any medals for it; but just the same we've stopped a 'eap of trouble.

"I'm going back to Sydney when the rains start anyway. Keep in touch with me, Long. Some day I may pass you the plate in church. If you ever go there. I'll expect you to be liberal. Pass the bottle. Tikala, 'ave another shot of 'ooch."

"ANCESTOR-WORSHIP," said Quong Yu as he filled the two glasses with the golden Curaçao, "is considered a sign of China's heathendom rather than its philosophy. The soul that is within me, my ego, is not truly individual. It is

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the composite of the souls of all my ancestors. Their physical characteristics have been reproduced, their talents, their faults, their tastes have all been handed down the long ladder of my race.

"If the living cell, the sperm, can carry these attributes, who shall say there is not also a spiritual biology? If I am bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh, am I not spirit of their spirit?

"They are I. I am they. If I honor myself, shall I not honor them? Shall I not honor their dust that once was flesh, living that I might live?

"We send our dead back to China that we may know honor is done. For if we have no pride in what is left of them how can we have pride in our own body, which is of them? The body is the temple of the spirit; the head is the sanctuary of that temple. Who would see the monuments of faith defiled because they perish in the course of Time?

"Therefore to me this relic you have brought is beyond all price. Now it shall go back to where the bones of my father, killed on Malaita, lie in their casket waiting for its restoration. I tell you this, Long, because I think you may understand it. because I owe it to you to make you feel you have not risked your life merely for dollars, for the whim of a yellow heathen."

He took reverently from the padded basket the treasure of Quong Yu, the fetish of the Dilava *hamal*, the token.

It was the dried head of Quong's immediate ancestor, the slant of the sunken eyes, the high Mongolian cheek-bones, proclaiming the race as plainly as the long cue, still adhering to the scalp.

"Filial devotion," said Quong Yu as he set the head into a casket of red lacker, lined with gold leaf, inscribed with ideographs, "is not a thing to be made light of. In it lies true immortality."

THE LUBBER

by Carol Haynes

I'VE never been a sailor, and I've never been to sea—
It's queer how certain things I love, should bring such dreams to me!
The creaking o' a hawser; the marking o' the tide;
And a ship like an eagle with her wings flung wide.
The lean masts—the tall masts;
The smell o' ropes and tar;
The thought o' bells to sound the hours;
The steering by a star.

I never see a ship come in, weary of wind and foam—
But I would be aboard her decks, and laughing to be home.
I never watch a ship set sail for some far, foreign place—
But I'd be in her bows to feel the wind against my face.

Folks think that I'm a plodding man, and wedded to my ways—
They'd call me daft, to know the way I spend my holidays:
A-hanging 'round the jetties and the wharves below the town,
A-watching and a-wondering 'til the sun goes down.

The rattle o' the winches; the lifting o' the chain;
The singing o' the sailor-men that face the sea again.
Port light—and starboard light;
The brave bosun's shout—
But I'm in the harbor,
And the tide's going out.

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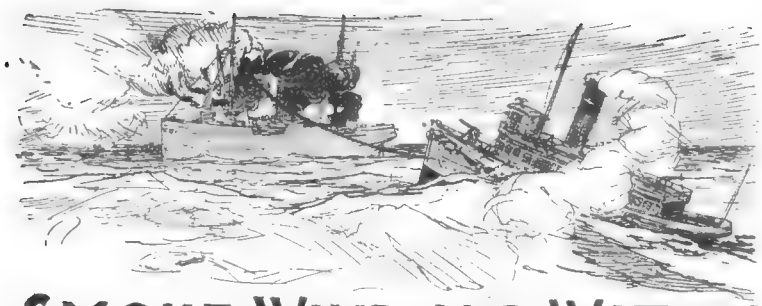

SMOKE WIND AND WATER

by Karl W Detzer

Author of "The Pantry Watch"

CAPTAIN MICHAEL McGIBBONY had never been sent out to the open lake. And he hoped fervently that he never would be.

He had gone into the fire department when a steam pumping-engine was an untried invention, and he a green lad, "just over." In those days apparatus bumped along cedar block pavements behind one panting horse. Then came the team, then the three horse hitch, and now throbbing engines.

For a man who loved horses, the advent of gas was as bitter a pill in the fire department as anywhere else. Captain McGibbony agreed to it for the sake of progress. But when the business of fighting fires came also to be a business of fighting fires on sea, Captain McGibbony rebelled.

His rebellion was private. At the time the order came, in his fiftieth year, assigning him to command the fire tug *Deluge*, he only cleared his throat and accepted it. He was not a seaman. He admitted that unblushingly. Water, as he knew it, came through a hose. Yet codes demand obedience; and after all the *Deluge* rarely left the narrow river. Its usual nightly duties were among the warehouses and lumber yards, where they crowd down to the edge of slow-moving, green water.

A tug is classed as an engine company. But from the time it leaves dock till it reaches the blaze, a licensed sea pilot shares command with the fire captain. Officers from land companies take their turns regularly aboard the tugs. How much they know of seamanship does not matter; the pilot attends to that. He navigates. When the pumps begin, the captain's power comes back automatically.

So Captain McGibbony moved into his new quarters and for six months there came no call for the fire tug to put out into Lake Michigan. But one might come. And he knew it.

His order arrived the night of a September gale. The streets were cloudy with whipping dust. Wind pranced on housetops, and fire-alarm headquarters worked at double speed.

At three minutes past ten, Captain McGibbony jumped across the rail of the *Deluge*, one leap behind Mullane, the pilot.

"Cast off!" he shouted.

Firemen on the pier threw the heavy hemps to the deck and scampered overside after them. Down below, Carter, the engineer, was jamming coal into the fireboxes. Mullane rushed into the wheelhouse. He pulled the whistle-cord before the door banged shut after him. The *Deluge* was moving—she nosed into the dark river while two wailing blasts of her siren ran ahead of her.

"Out to the lake!" Captain McGibbony ordered sternly. "The coast guard reports a ship on fire near the Six Mile Crib."

Mullane twisted the wheel.

"She's blowing out there, sir," he commented.

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Captain McGibbony looked at his men. For most of them, too, it was the first trip in a blow. There were Walters and Carrigan, who called the deck a floor six months ago when they came to the *Deluge*, and Kelly, a younger fellow, who wore his girl's picture in his watch. Nielson held some claim to knowing water, Mullane was a seaman; so the sealed official document in the pilot-house testified.

"The Coast Guard's gone out already," Captain McGibbony shouted now. "But there's probably aplenty for us to do too."

A block up the river the jack-knife bridge had parted in the middle. Its two skeleton arms lifted slowly into the air, with the lanterns on its ends swinging drunkenly.

Mullane jerked at the rope over the wheel, and again a scream of the siren punctured the night. Far ahead other bridge bells were ringing. A last, reckless automobile leaped across the "Link" drawbridge; then it, too, broke apart in the air.

The knife-like bow of the *Deluge* sliced through white, buzzing water. Its engine thumped like a giant's heart; short swells splashed away against the black piers, indistinct at either side; the last bridge dropped behind.

McGibbony stood in the pilot-house, his binoculars swinging from the strap in his hands. His men, except Carter, who clanged the doors of the fire-boxes and watched the steam gage in the engine room, gathered at the foot of the wheel-house ladder. There they remained respectfully, watching the lake spread out ahead.

The Coast Guard station at the right of the river mouth lay deserted. Against the white boat-house, a dark patch indicated the open doors, where the life-savers had gone out in their gasoline launch. On the left looked down the steady, blood-red eye of the pier-head light.

"Watch for the Coast Guard boat," warned Captain McGibbony. "They're out here somewheres. We don't want to run 'em down."

"They'll have a lantern aboard," replied the pilot, as he leaned on the wheel and twisted it to port. "We'll see 'em easy enough."

The *Deluge* kicked as she neared the quick, blinking lights at the ends of the outer harbor. Wind sang across her bow. With a great heave that threw her nose under a roller and spun her propeller in the air, she left the breakwater and bucked the storm in the open lake.

Captain McGibbony braced his feet and unsteadily turned his glasses.

"That's her," he said, and pointed. "That spot of light out there."

"She's burning good," Mullane answered, and after a moment, "Looks like she's right in on top of the crib."

Captain McGibbony opened the door from the pilot-house.

"Get out two lines, about three sections each," he directed the men who clung to the upperworkings, "and take the cover off that forward gun."

Three pipemen ran back into the darkness to pull the hose lines on deck. They tottered, like mere landsmen, as they crossed to the hydrants that lined the rail. Nielson walked forward, with his feet wide apart in an angle that told of experience aboard ship before he entered the fire service. The forward gun, as the four-inch brass nozzle is called, perched on a steel tripod near the bow. Unbuckling the canvas, Nielson turned its huge handlever and tested its aiming devices.

The blazing ship lay straight ahead under a pink cloud of smoke. From time to time, a spot of light flashed aboard her, or a flaming stick of wood, ripped away by the wind, sailed in the air like a star shell, and plunged to darkness in the water.

"They're square up agin the crib," announced Mullane. "You can see the crib light when the smoke blows away."

"Then the crib-tenders have taken off the crew."

Captain McGibbony was relieved. Fire was one thing, fire at sea another. Wind and water were not his elements. Smoke was; he could stand more of it than a chimney.

"No, I don't think so."

Mullane was speaking between tugs at the wheel.

"That's the one the city abandoned. There's just a light on it. That's all. Wonder how they happened to run against it?"

"Smoke," answered the captain. "They've been afire and was trying to get into the harbor. The wind was behind 'em, and the smoke in front."

"Maybe," the pilot agreed. "But it looks to me like poor seamanship."

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The burning vessel lay half a mile ahead. Already a pitchy smell swept past the *Deluge*, and now and then a spark whipped across the water to fall, hissing, on her wet deck.

"Around the other side of her and turn in," directed the captain.

Mullane looked ahead cautiously.

"Aye, sir," he answered. "But they's danger of that crib. She's just a reef, you know, made of busted rock and iron pipes."

"Well, we can't get at the fire from here!" Captain McGibbony growled. "Other side."

The fire tug swung in a great circle, out of the smoke. Captain McGibbony climbed to the bridge and pulled the cover off the searchlight. He tipped the lens up, and shot a clear, white bar of light against the clouds. Then down it turned, till it made a shaking spot upon the water, and slowly, jerkily, focused on the burning ship.

She was a black old craft, of considerable size, one of those wooden cargo-steamers which are going the way of the horse-drawn fire-engine. The fire was aft, where a great, round funnel of smoke twisted aloft from her cabins and upperworkings. On the forward end and the bridge, a bulky shadow separated into black, crisscross shapes.

Captain McGibbony looked closely. Now and then the spots moved.

"Men, ain't they?" he asked, holding the glass to Mullane's eyes.

The pilot squinted through it.

"About six of them, I'd say. The crew, waiting. Why don't they shoot some water on her?"

"There's the coast guard." The captain pointed.

A white boat tossed into the blinding path of the searchlight. Its canvas spray hoods stood out like wings and the heads of seven men were seen above its gunwale.

"Run alongside the ship, throw your headline over her stern, and then reverse your engines," ordered McGibbony. "Just enough to keep us off the rocks. We'll run the gun-nozzle from the deck, and I'll take a line over on her. Steady now—steady! Not so fast!"

The *Deluge* pawed at the white-topped rollers, lay back and rolled forward. Fire, reaching through the cabin skylights, turned the water to a frothy, strawberry color, against which the crib stood up like a black wall.

"When we hit her, go overside, Nielson," Captain McGibbony called.

Nielson waited, with the line in his hands.

"Make us fast to the stern."

The fireman nodded his helmet. The other vessel lay over on her starboard side at a sharp angle. Her crew were in plain sight now. There were five of them on their feet and a sixth man on his back, a wet bundle lying without any motion.

"The life-savers is beating us," Nielson shouted suddenly. "Over there—on the stones."

At the inner edge of the reef where the rocks thrust up their heads impudently, Captain McGibbony saw two yellow-jacketed figures wading into the shoal from their boat. He called to them, but the gale ran away with his voice.

"They're throwing a line overside, captain, look——"

The wind had flung water into Nielson's face, and his eyes streamed, as if he were weeping. "One man's going over—two of them."

Captain McGibbony nodded. The *Deluge* edged nearer, while another seaman on the burning ship went overside down the rope. Another.

"Them last two ain't going," the captain called to Nielson.

"That one on the deck ain't moved, as far as I can see," Nielson answered. "It looks to me like one of them is hurt and the other's staying with him."

Captain McGibbony lifted the trap and bellowed down to Mullane.

"Port—hard over!"

Mullane spun the wheel. Even within the pilot-house he heard flames crackling now to the tinkling of glass; from somewhere within the ship's hold, steam was hissing.

A high sea rushed in, and when it fell back, as if to catch its breath, Captain McGibbony tilted the searchlight down to the stern of the wreck.

"*Niagara of Duluth*," he read.

One more minute and the nose of the tug bumped the hot rail of the larger boat.

"Now—" Captain McGibbony shouted, "over that stern post."

Nielson leaped up to the scorched deck, with his coil of line hanging loose on his arm. He pulled the hemp rope after him, and slid its loop over the post. Below the forward deck a winch complained as it drew the

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cordage tight. Nielson jumped back to the *Deluge*, and running forward, tugged at the hose.

"Hold her like this," Captain McGibbony called into the pilot-house to Mullane. "Keep her just this way if you can. We'll go over with the line."

A man thrust his head from the engine-room companion. It was Carter, awaiting orders to start the pump.

"Watch us," Captain McGibbony ordered. "I'll try to make you hear my whistle."

The *Deluge* pranced with the waves, grinding her steel-shod bow into the complaining rail and side of the *Niagara*. Smoke ran out of the portholes, skylight and hatches, paused on the wind as if surprized, and then whipped away toward the bow. A long arm of fire waved from the top of the cabins, with shorter arms after it.

"Walters and Carrigan!" Captain McGibbony shouted.

The two pipemen ran forward.

"You take the cannon," their officer commanded. "Turn loose on them upper-workings and knock 'em down, just as soon as we're out of the road. Hold the fire inside if you can. Got your places? All right——"

He watched one moment, while the two firemen, jumping to the great brass nozzle, twisted its levers and wheels. They tilted it up, then sidewise; it was ready; by one turn its heavy shot of lake water could hurl across the decks, tearing down anything in its way.

"You, Nielson, follow me up."

The big fellow was lumbering forward now with the three inch hose.

"I'll go first. Kelly, give Nielson a hand with the line. Then run forward, Kelly, and see what ails them two men lying there by the pilot-house. Hold the line alone, Nielson, till Kelly and I get back to help you. Ready? All right, over we go!"

THE *Deluge* bucked. Captain McGibbony waited and swung across the rail just as the deck of the little tug lifted again to the height of the tilted *Niagara*. Nielson and Kelly climbed after him.

On the *Niagara*, a sudden gale whipped them, tugging at their helmets. Kelly slipped, and caught himself.

"This way," Captain McGibbony called. "These fellows must be knocked out."

A man in an officer's cap lay in the lee of the wheel-house, his eyes closed as if he were stunned, his body lashed to a ventilator to keep it from slipping. Near by an exhausted seaman had hooked himself by rope to a ring-bolt. His teeth were chattering. Wind had blown his shirt to rags. What seemed to be his jacket, was stretched over the man on the deck.

"What's the matter," McGibbony called when the storm gave him breath. "Why didn't you get off with the rest of them?"

The sailor nodded toward his officer, and then in the direction of the reef. He was a Norwegian.

"They take the rest in," he said. "This is the captain. He can't go down the rope."

McGibbony looked at the reef, lighted briefly by a spurt of flame. For the first time he saw that the Coast Guard boat was putting off with its load of rescued crew. Two life-savers had remained behind on the rocks.

"It comes back," the Norwegian told him. "They say you put us on your boat. They take in this bunch. Then they come back."

"Get a move on you, then," McGibbony shouted. "Quick—untie yourself. Kelly, get this fellow down to the tug. I'll bring the other one."

Steadying himself against the wheel-house, Captain McGibbony cut the officer's ropes with his ax and boosted him to his shoulder.

"What knocked him out?" he shouted.

Kelly was leading the Norwegian aft.

"He stay too long down there."

The sailor pointed to the hold.

"Smoke got him."

"Let a little smoke get him!" McGibbony growled. "Take your man down first, Kelly. I'll sling you this one."

Kelly dropped to the deck of the fire tug. The sailor jumped helplessly into his arms. Like a bale, McGibbony swung down the officer.

"Stretch him out on the other side where'll he get air," he shouted. "Tell Mullane to keep an eye on him. Take that seaman down to the engine room. Carter'll warm him up. You get back here."

The *Niagara* rolled uneasily. Captain

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McGibbony ran toward the cabin, where Nielson waited, unable to get the hose in place alone.

"Here we are!" McGibbony shouted. "Stand away."

He swung his ax; the white panel of the cabin door split. Fire that had been penned within sprang out at the invitation of the wind. Its heat was scorching; McGibbony pulled his helmet farther over his eyes. As loudly as he could he blew the shrill whistle. The hose tugged in answer as it jerked full of pressure pumped from the lake. Nielson twisted the brass water-gate.

A stream roared into the burning passageway. Light feathers of flame, that had played over the flimsy cabin planking, withered and darkened under the onslaught. Smoke whisked out of the door.

"In—in we go! Tone down your stream —there."

Captain McGibbony choked over his command.

"Now, low down, on the floor—I know it's hot—down, Nielson—open up a bit, there, wash it back and forth, so—here comes Kelly."

McGibbony guided the front end of the nozzle, sweeping it across the narrow passage in the deck-house. Nielson leaned against the pressure of the line, his toes braced on the floor.

"The gun's starting," he called.

A roar came from the *Deluge;* a spout of white water tilted upward, kicking with gasps of air and lifting in a wide arc. A mighty stream raked the upperworking of the *Niagara,* with a splintering of wood and a rain of muddy water; the tug's cannon was in action.

The *Niagara* reeled, tipsy with the winds. Cabin doors banged in the motion, and water from the hose, running crazily about the washboards, made miniature waves in the aisle.

"Pull up," ordered Captain McGibbony. "It's down below us. We got to get down there. There must be a way from here."

He turned his flashlight upon the panels above the door.

"Assistant Engineer," he read; on the next, "Second Assistant Engineer."

The rooms were foggy, that was all; but in a third opening smoke poured up like a geyser.

Captain McGibbony scraped along the planks on his knees, feeling the smooth wall.

"Here it is," he called back. "Here's an iron ladder."

"It's the engine-room companion," Nielson said excitedly, behind him.

"Wet her down," McGibbony ordered.

Nielson tipped the hose, cannily, down into a hole where timber was crackling. The iron ladder steamed as the water split over it.

"Down we go," McGibbony announced, calm in spite of the rattle. "Watch the rung here—all right?"

He breathed for a moment at the mouth of the nozzle where air bubbles ran out with the water. Then he swung quickly over the edge. His boots trod on an iron grating at the bottom. He turned his flashlight down through it. He could see the engines, dead and helpless, under ringlets of white smoke. On his own level, in front and at the sides, a weak, pink light shone through the openings. The captain sniffed.

"Coal bunkers burning," he said hoarsely.

Bent under loops of hose, his two men followed him around a gallery of hot iron sheets, and then down a second ladder. Hotter smoke rose to punish them. They could feel the waves beating a wild jig against the sides.

Kelly fell heavily; rose up, holding his stomach, and toppled a second time.

"It's the drunken boat," he complained as he righted himself.

Nielson kicked the little tripod to position. Its toes dug into the planking and the weight of the hose settled on it. The two pipemen breathed relievedly; it was a short reprieve; Captain McGibbony was pulling ahead again.

"A little farther," he begged, choking. "Look for a opening."

"There's nowhere to breathe," Kelly muttered. "My insides is splitting."

"Keep your mouth closed," the captain recommended.

They stumbled forward dizzily through the passage that led to the cargo holds. Here the air was raging. Freight hammered about with the movement of the ship —packing crates, boxes, hampers. At each fresh roll the fire scattered, spread, and lighted with a new hilarity.

Nielson set up the hose again. It hummed with the water that the pump hurled through it. The air thickened. A whiff of carbonic gas seeped along the passage.

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The *Niagara* lifted impatiently, and as she tumbled back, her keel wrenched in the rocks of the crib. Water washed across the floor and leaked through the beams where the cannon of the *Deluge* was pounding it on top.

McGibbony guided the nozzle stubbornly. Behind the shield which his back made, sprawled Kelly, still holding one hand to the sickness in his stomach, the hose on his shoulder. Nielson hugged it at the rear. His yellow eyebrows were gone; his face showed a patch of burns.

The *Niagara* gave a final, violent lunge. Then she stood upright, balancing. There was a dizzy motion, and into the cargo hold came a rush of water and of wind.

Kelly staggered to his feet. Nielson yelled.

"She's free," he shouted excitedly. "The wind's blowed her off the reef."

The ship trembled from bow to stern and then slipped on even keel with a long, catlike motion. Captain McGibbony peered around at the man who scrambled behind him. It was Kelly, looking through the smoke whirl with eyes redder than the firelight.

"Stick where you are," McGibbony thundered. "The line's holding. They'll run alongside us with our tug!"

Kelly slipped back to his knees. Fire jumped across the decking overhead, pausing at each wooden beam to lick up particles of dust and make a windy, throaty sound. The heat eddied. Up and down the column of water thrashed the flames; they retreated and came back for more. Smoke settled lower.

"We ain't making much headway."

It was Nielson, growling to put down his fear.

Captain McGibbony squatted in the center of the disorderly hold like a bronze Buddha, his rubber coat wrinkled and spread around him, the brass nozzle in his gloved hands.

"We can't turn back," he said determinedly. "It's too late."

"Why not?" Kelly demanded.

"The end's out of that coal bunker. No half-dozen hose could drown it. Inch ahead here."

Captain McGibbony closed his jaws sharply; there was poison afloat somewhere, a smothering acid that pinched his lungs. He remembered the steamer was old. There was another danger—water might capsize her if it ran down on one side too heavily.

Noise was less deafening for a moment. A pink glow reflected from forward and aft. Then a new note broke above the snapping of the fire and the rattle of waves against the sides. There was a crackle, a thundering, roaring din as if the air were shaken by a fit of coughing.

With a white blast the coal bunkers ripped apart. Captain McGibbony crumpled forward, like a man of wet cardboard. Kelly cried out, threw his hands above his head, and dropped. Water splashed as he hit it. Nielson growled and rolled over.

Gasses puffed in from the wrecked compartment and sharp, blinding heat that made the skin crawl. Burning coals scattered over the floor. New flame kindled in the stacked crates and the brass nozzle flopped helplessly.

IT WAS Nielson who was first upon his feet. He halted, unsteadily, his eyelids, wrinkled shut, his hands fumbling before him. The steamer careened in the trough. But Nielson's legs bent with the angles of the deck. His body swayed to the motion. The seaman in him came into action.

Forward he ran, with a hesitating shuffle, a sea gait learned on rough Atlantic nights. His burned hands touched hot iron. He retreated. Somewhere there was a passage, down the center. That he knew. He blundered forward again. The ship heaved, as if intent upon throwing him from his feet.

Here was the passage; Nielson felt a draft pulling through it, hot behind his ears, where the wind fanned past his helmet. He ran, until his shins smashed into an iron ladder. He opened his eyes.

Through the tears he saw mottled pink and red. He rubbed his sleeve across his face; the tears kept coming. His eyes smarted, his head ached. A cool breath of air dropped from above. He reached with his hand for the ladder.

Abruptly his thoughts cleared. What was he doing—running? Where were the captain, and Kelly? He must show them how to get out.

He stumbled down the passage back to the fire. It roared now unchecked. He

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tripped over the hose line. It gave under his foot—slack. The hose was empty. Then the *Deluge* had cast off, or else the rope had parted and she had broken away.

Nielson dropped to the floor. Hot water covered his gloves and nipped at his wrists. He tried to speak—to shout, but his gasping whisper was lost amid the greater noises of catastrophe. The vessel lurched viciously, throwing the sea-trained fireman heavily to his side. His hand touched a piece of cloth. Blindly he ran his fingers along it; it was a body, either the captain or Kelly. Under the man's arm lay a helmet. Nielson felt the peak of it. It had an anchor—this was the captain.

Nielson jerked, and Captain McGibbony rolled over.

"Come," Nielson panted.

He tried to pull; his fingers were too weak and slippery.

"Where's the pipe?" It was the captain, speaking in a raw whisper. "Don't drop the pipe, men. I'll be back in just a minute."

McGibbony sat up, bewildered, pulling upon Nielson's unsteady arm, his eyes running water.

The fireman leaned toward his officer's ear.

"Line's busted." He coughed; something was grating his throat.

"Busted?"

Captain McGibbony lifted himself up.

"Let's get out then. Where's Kelly?"

Nielson faltered. The fire was pressing nearer, swinging across the deckbeams overhead where it once had been halted. He tried again to see, but his eyes showed only pink light. He stumbled backward, his foot caught, he fell headlong over Kelly's still form.

Fumbling with the wet, steaming jacket, he found its neck and slipped his fingers into it. He staggered up and pulled Kelly, half-conscious to his knees. Captain McGibbony was there; he touched Nielson's face.

"This way!"

The fireman's voice was a whisper under the rattle of fire and the heavy wash of the lake. His sea legs carried him instinctively to the passage. It was hotter now. Somehow he was dragging Kelly, who kept on his hands and knees. He pushed Captain McGibbony ahead.

A breath of cooler air reached down once more from above. Again Nielson's shins bumped the bottom rung of the iron ladder. Vaguely he realized that it was the center hatch. He tried to climb, but slipped to the bottom.

Captain McGibbony steadied himself, one hand on the ladder, the other searching overhead. There it was cooler. There was air. There was a ladder to climb. A ladder! That was better. The fireman in him reached up instinctively, and with heavy, awkward feet he began to mount. One step, two of them. He hung with his elbow around the upright. Three steps—the fourth and fifth together with a great effort. His face was touched by a cool wind. Spray broke on his cheek.

His mind cleared. Fresh air blew the smoke out of his head.

Now he remembered, dully, indistinctly. Kelly and Nielson were in the hold. There was no water in the hose. Where was the *Deluge?*

He climbed hurriedly to the deck, where he hung to a ventilator. The gale had toned down perceptibly. A flash of white light struck his face and blinded his eyes. It was the searchlight of the *Deluge*, pulling closer.

The air was loud with voices. The burning *Niagara* leaped and gave a shudder. The fire tug had bumped; its line uncoiled and whirled upon the higher deck. A man pulled himself over the rail. It was Carrigan.

"Where's the boys?" he cried.

Captain McGibbony pointed to the open hatch.

Walters followed Carrigan, and then a pair of strange men, in uniforms that did not belong to the fire department. They were sailors, life-savers from the Coast Guard boat. Captain McGibbony swayed, clutching at the ventilator.

One of the life-savers gripped his shoulder. McGibbony jerked away.

"Tend the boys, they're down there," he ordered.

His throat still ached, but his lungs were clear.

"We're going to take you all off," the Coast Guard man told him.

"You are? Who do you think you are?"

Captain McGibbony tottered to the rail. The life-saver followed him, plucking at his jacket.

"This ship's lost," he argued. "You got no call to stay longer."

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Captain McGibbony knocked away the other's hand. He touched his own head—where was his helmet? Its absence angered him.

"Get out!" he cried furiously to the life-saver. "What do you know about the fire business?"

He reeled a few steps farther, then straightened up, almost erect.

Carrigan was scrambling out of the hatch with Nielson over his shoulder. Walters appeared, dragging Kelly. Captain McGibbony watched the rescue silently. He saw both pipemen lifted overside and dropped to the arms of other men from the life boat, who waited on the *Deluge*.

Squaring his shoulders, he walked aft as steadily as he could. Behind him sparks were whipping along the deck and a great tower of flame shot into the air above the exploded coal bunkers. Smoke swelled in red clouds off across the lake. An eighth of a mile away another fire-tug was chopping through the water.

"Come, now—" it was another Coast Guard, wheedling. "It's time to get off of here. You're in danger."

Captain McGibbony spun around and recognized the intruder as a captain.

"I won't get off!" he thundered. "Carrigan, Walters, you firemen!"

"Aye," his two men ran back to answer.

"Are we made fast?" the fire captain demanded.

His voice scratched his throat; his eyes seemed to be full of milk; his head ached.

"Yes, sir, both ends," replied Walters.

"Very good, then. Are those two men from this here steamer aboard our tug?"

"Yes, sir." It was Carrigan answering this time. "Both of them. That captain's pepped up now. He says this ship's like to go down any minute."

"Go down, nothing!" growled Captain McGibbony. "Nothing burning as hard as this would give the water a chance at it! Tell that captain I want to talk to him."

"He can't walk yet," Carrigan responded. "He's eat too much smoke."

"Smoke!" Captain McGibbony snorted.

His breath caught and set him to choking again.

"What's smoke?" he demanded when he recovered. "It can't drown you, can it? Go find out how to lower his anchors. And tell Carter to slow down his engine. Drop the *Deluge* anchors. This here fight ain't over by a long shot. It's us or the fire that's going to beat."

"Yes, sir," Carrigan answered respectfully, and loped away.

"And two five-inch hose lines," McGibbony called after him. "Get them overside and charge them—quick, quick! Don't waste all the time! Walters, get some of these here life-saving birds to help you. That's it—now another one."

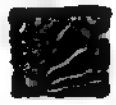
Water pounded once more upon the flames. Captain McGibbony, bareheaded, his face peeling, floundered weakly to the top of the deck house.

"Here's a elegant spot to hit it," he commented as he set a mixed crew of firemen and life-savers to work.

"And here's another."

He ordered a second line into position. His head was clearing, he told himself. Smoke wasn't bad—if only the infernal boat would stop its jumping!

So the burning *Niagara*, with the *Deluge* warped alongside, and with men from the Coast Guard service helping to handle the hose, dragged at her anchor, as the wind pulled her ashore——



DAWN broke with a flat mist. Fire gleamed only occasionally through the skylights; the smoke clouds had thinned and were gray and yellow, instead of jet. Captain McGibbony stood above an open hatchway, directing a third line on the flames. Kelly had come back. Only one pipeman lay on the deck of the fire tug—Neilson, whose sight still blackened whenever he opened his eyes.

At ten o'clock, McGibbony approached the captain of the Coast Guard.

"I ain't a seaman," he said shortly. "I don't know nothing about water and I don't claim to. But this fire's about out. What do you and the chief of this here boat want to do with her?"

"It's your boat, you saved her," the other retorted.

McGibbony grunted. His lips were blueish, his face was white except for streaks of soot. He tried to look severe, but his feet interfered, causing him to stumble and catch at a broken hatch cover.

"It ain't my boat," he answered scornfully, gazing from the ragged steamer where he stood to his own trim tug.

"That *Deluge* is mine. And I say I ain't

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a seaman, but it looks to me like she's dragging her anchor, looks like both of 'em is dragging their anchors."

"The wind's pulling them in toward the breakwater," the captain of the Coast Guard admitted. "We'd better run around these rocks into shore and beach her where it's still. You poured too much water into her. She's like to sink any minute. In there she won't."

The *Niagara* stood off the beach at noon with six feet of water under her keel. She lay low, with only an occasional whiff of smoke seeping through her broken upper workings. The first officer was again on board. Life-savers stood by, or rummaged through the hold for more traces of fire.

CAPTAIN McGIBBONY of the fire tug *Deluge*, sat in his office. The company log lay open before him.

"Called by telephone to location at six-mile crib," he wrote awkwardly, with blistering fingers. "The property burning was a three-story ship. Contents total loss. Ship's walls still standing, although second floor dropped. No danger to traffic. Cause unknown. Casualties, Captain McGibbony and Fireman Nielson and Kelly—"

He threw down his pen.

"Kelly," he asked severely, "shall I say you was overcome by smoke?"

"No, sir," Kelly answered hurriedly.

"Was you, Nielson?"

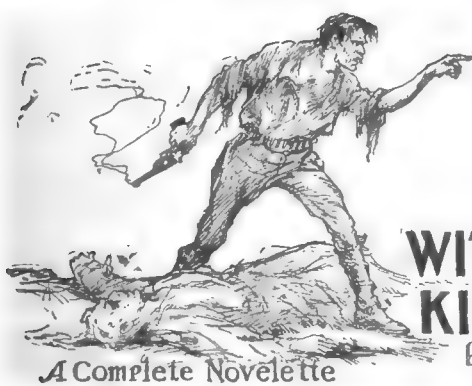
"No, sir."

"Well, we got to say something. Them life-savers is going to turn in some kind of a report. I know we weren't overcome—but I reckon they'll think so."

"If we wasn't overcome, we wasn't," replied Kelly. "We was seasick!"

"Certainly, seasick!" answered Captain Gibbony. "It was them sailors that ate the smoke."

He wrote laboriously. His arm dropped before he had finished. His head sank; he jerked it up; it sank again, like a man going to sleep. Seasick! The honor of the department had been preserved.



WITH WHITE KID GLOVES

A Complete Novelette

by Meigs O Frost

THROUGHOUT the night the stabbing flashes of shots that had ringed them since swift tropical darkness fell had drawn closer. With dawn they knew the game was up. The ambush had been thorough and complete. It was no use now to curse the scouts, to speculate whether they had been stupid, cowardly or traitorous.

Could they reach Tegucigalpa, perched high in Honduras' mountains, they would be safe. Their own forces still held that town. But the little band of white men at the head of the tattered, bare-foot fragments of their native forces knew they would never see Tegucigalpa again.

Down off the coast by Ceiba port were the United States Marines, they knew. But that spelled no refuge for them. Even if they could break through. This time the Marines, if they took hand at all, would be with the forces of the government the insurrectos had so nearly overthrown. It was a venal, murderous, foot-pad sort of

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government. But the State Department at Washington had not yet been convinced of that, officially. And it stood by the four-year-old official recognition.

If Guatemala had not come in— But Guatemala had. That milk was spilt all over the shop.

So the little band of hard-bitten white men prepared to die. Jesting, cursing, or grimly silent, as ran each individual bent. But in any case, to die fighting.

Back in the States, they knew, folk laughed at "banana wars." But when you're facing death in one at dawn, unshaven, unbathed, coffeeless, comes conviction that the dead in a banana war are quite as dead as those who went west in the gigantic blood bath of the Somme.

Somebody passed round a flask. It served in lieu of coffee. The last case of cartridges was broken out. Belts were filled.

Carruthers, their leader, a bit gray now, scarred with years of tropical adventurings, holder of a general's commission with the insurrectos, lowered the glasses with which he had been searching the terrane.

"Our best bet," said he, "is to smash through down by that gully on the left. It's a thousand-to-one shot. But anything else is plain suicide. We'll get all of 'em we can while we're going."

He glanced swiftly about the little band.

"We'll keep together," he said. "Our native bunch'll probably scatter after the first rush. Nobody here feels like the white flag and the 'dobe wall, does he?"

Nobody did.

Ward, the English soldier of fortune, suddenly shifted rifle-butt to shoulder and snapped a shot into the underbrush where he glimpsed a movement.

"Rotten shooting, old fox," came a call from beneath a clump of scrub. "Cut it out. Might get better if you keep tryin'."

Through the tangle of tropical growth a crouching figure emerged, ragged, bleeding from long thorn-gashes.

"Hello!" said Carruthers, regarding him quizzically. "I'd marked you off the books, Griffith. Thought they got you last night."

"Did their little best, general," grinned the ragged one. " 'Specially that Manuel bird who led us into this. I was just a few feet behind him when he reported to one of Alvaradez's scouts. He's been with 'em for the last week, I found. Delivered us, all wrapped and labeled."

"The old double-cross again!"

Carruthers' shrug was eloquent.

"And I saved that yellow pup's life! Wonder if there's a *hombre* in the whole outfit, barring white men, that'll stay put?"

"He'll stay put where I left him," said the youngster. "The hundred gold he got for us wont do him much good now where he's gone!"

"We're shoving off down that gully to the left," Carruthers told him. "Fire's been light down that way."

"Better not. I just made me a little *passer* that way, general. Big force both sides the gully. Laying for us, it looks."

"Good night!" Carruthers shrugged fatalistically. "Thanks for finding it out, anyway. That means we check out, I reckon. We'll smash straight ahead, then."

He drew from his hip pocket his small emergency flask.

"Here, kid," said he, "I can decorate you with the Order of the Three Fingers, anyway."

Griffith gulped the three fingers and grinned again.

"That helps some," he said.

Carruthers finished the rest.

"All right," he ordered casually, picking up his rifle. "Let's go."

Lounging figures snapped taut. Disregarding their own native force already sneaking off through the underbrush, the little band started its crouching advance, firing as it went.

Shouted orders in Spanish rang through the air.

The ring of fire closed in upon them.

—

BULLETS through leg and shoulder, face streaming blood from a glancing blow of rifle-butt he had only partly parried as he shot the man who swung it, young Richard Griffith came back to life at the sound of voices. With the instinctive caution of the man who has had his full share of "help-yourself fighting," he lay motionless, opening the merest slit of one eye. There, a few feet from him, stood his general.

Carruthers, feet planted wide apart to brace himself, empty pistol gripped in hanging hand, was torn and slashed by a score of wounds. Rifles at the ready, a group of government troops stood behind

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General Jesus Alvaradez, their commander. About the insurrecto leader's feet lay sprawled some dozen huddled bodies. He had taken toll before his cartridges ran out.

"It is a pleasure to meet you again, *amigo*," drawled the voice of Alvaradez, playing with his prisoner as cat with mouse. "I am empowered by *el presidente* to bring you under suitable escort to headquarters. There a general's commission with the government forces awaits so gallant a fighter. Also a bonus of twenty thousand gold."

"For what?" asked Carruthers. "My good looks?"

"For information," said Alvaradez, "of the identity of certain citizens of Honduras who financed this revolution. You, it seems, are one of the few who know. You can tell. Otherwise—" he shrugged carelessly—"is there any message you care to have taken for you? My instructions are explicit, much as I might regret them."

The veteran, swaying slightly on his feet, braced suddenly.

"You're right I've got a message," rose his voice. "Get the shooting over quick—and don't bury me!"

"No burial?" Alvaradez's voice rose, too, in surprise. "Why not, *amigo*?"

"Don't '*amigo*' me, you half-breed *pelado*!"

The voice that carried the deadly insult was steady.

"I know your whole record," it went on. "You saved your own yellow life last time by turning over the men who made you. Why don't I want you to bury me? So the buzzards'll eat me! That's why! I don't want to rest under any ground that has your kind of double-crossing vermin crawling on top of it!"

With a last summoning of fleeting strength, the veteran raised his heavy revolver, empty, crusted with black powder-stains. He hurled it crashing into Alvaradez' livid face.

As the shots crackled, young Griffith drifted again into blackness.

They had left him for dead. It was hours afterward that he crawled beneath the stars to the obscurity of the underbrush. It was weeks later that a skeleton of a man in a native canoe crept alongside an American fruit steamer off Puerto Cortez, and by grace of a kindly captain, made his way back to the United States.

Some of the happenings of his youth among fighting men might fade. But never the memory of that man who had died in the mountains of Honduras near Tegucigalpa, rather than betray those who had put their trust in him.

"AND now, gentlemen," said the chairman of the City Reform League's executive committee, "we come to the matter of the selection of a superintendent of police."

The campaign had ended two weeks before. A city political ring, long years in power, had been pried loose from its stronghold after a bitter battle of ballots.

Seated around the long conference table in the suite of law-offices from which, quite unofficially, that campaign had been conducted, was a strangely assorted group of men.

Curious contrasts were there; contrasts ever to be seen where some political revolution brings strange elements side by side working for the same goal, but animated by a wide diversity of motives.

There was old Paul Bailey, reformer as puritanical as ever stood on horse-pond bank and watched a dripping crone emerge from the ordeal of ducking-stool. Cheek by jowl he sat with the Honorable Bernard Cassidy, disgruntled politician and ward-leader of the old ring, who, maintaining his outward show of loyalty to his political associates of years, had jumped the fence secretly to sate ancient grudges. There sat Forstall Gaillard, newspaper editor, university graduate, with his carefully nursed affectations of uncouthness that found expression in baggy clothes and unshaven face. "The would-be king-maker," the opposition press called him.

There, too, was a small group of groomed and shaven business men, boyishly exultant that victory had followed their sporadic and virtuous dip into politics. And mingled with them was a scattering of the hard-faced professional politicians, wiry-lean or flabbily fat, ranking as "ward lieutenants." Job-holders and job-getters all, Hessians of the battlefields of caucus, primary and general election. Their shrewd philosophy picked the winner as far in advance as possible and sought ever to climb on the band-wagon long before it was recognized as a band-wagon. Swift of shibboleth were they, talking in the rubber-stamp phrases of their calling.

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Their breed the old days knew—the captains of the men-at-arms, seeking ever the jackals' share of the loot of kingdoms. These days their loot came in the form of salary-vouchers drawn against the illimitable coffers of that stupid and sleeping giant, the people.

The people might afford the luxury of sleeping between elections. But these men were on the job three hundred and sixty-five days of every year—and most of the nights.

Now the professionals and their hand-picked "shirt-fronts" were gathered, the shouting of that election-night of victory hardly over, to put formal endorsement on names long since selected. To "recommend," to the city administration they had seated, the men to fill the appointive offices of a city of thousands of souls. To build, if possible, the same sort of political machine they had just overthrown.

It was the old, old power they wanted. Their leader, trained throughout his youth in the cohorts of that just-defeated machine, had labored hard, however, to camouflage the old power with a seeming of civic virtue.

"You can't get away with murder just after a reform election, boys." That was the word to the professionals.

And to the executive committee with its sprinkling of amateurs—the "shirt-fronts"—

"You can't get anywhere without organization, gentlemen. You had to organize to lick an organization. And your new organization gets you nowhere if it hasn't got the best candidates in the field just now."

So they settled down "to discuss" a man to fill that job of superintendent of police.

The chairman let them talk. It always helped when they got it off their chests, he found. If the process of getting it off their chests included any attempt to take the bit in the teeth—well, he was familiar with the mechanism and the operation of the old steam-roller. But now he glowed with combined sensations of virtue and of power. The reformers stood with hats off to his powers of organization. The old gang! He'd shown them who was who in *this* burg! Now he'd put up a superintendent of police for 'em to shoot at!

"I've had it brought to my attention," said he, in the stereotyped political argot, "that there's a young man in this city who will find general support if we name him for this office.

"It's an important post. You know how much it helped us to be able to shoot the police department full of holes with those graft and gambling charges during the campaign. We need a good man in it, for the sake of the new administration.

"A number of this young man's friends have been to see me in his behalf. He has not sought the job himself. You all know him. He is a young business man of more than ordinary experience.

"He has handled men. He still can handle men. His army record is splendid. It began when, a youngster of seventeen, he ran away and fought through the Boer War. He has fought in a number of smaller wars in Latin America. He held a colonel's commission in the United States Army during the World War. He is a fighting man.

"He was with us, heart and soul, in this last campaign. He it was who organized our precinct poll-squads and led them on election day, gentlemen, when our young men met the ward-heelers and sluggers of the old ring on their own grounds and beat them at their own game."

He paused a moment for the customary effect. He heard the sibilant whispers running around the table. He knew that the amateurs there were taking childish delight in their prescience in identifying the man he had not yet named. It made them feel that they were behind the scenes, he knew—expert in human vanity that he was.

"And so, gentlemen," he concluded, "while I have no power as chairman to nominate or to originate any motion, I would deem it a public service to our city if some one of you would see fit to place in nomination before this committee the name of Richard Griffith to be recommended unanimously by us to our newly elected mayor and city commission for appointment as superintendent of police."

Always in any gathering there is a confirmed mover; a seconder equally confirmed. They worked automatically.

SO IT was that Richard Griffith, who since the Armistice had been going his way quietly along the paths of business, came again to the command of men.

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Presently they sent for him, to sound him out.

Would he take the job?

"Yes, I'll take it," said he, "but only if it's clear from the start that there are no strings tied to it. You've just seen that same department wrecked by graft and wire-pulling and political influence. You've seen it help carry a whole city administration down with it when it fell."

"Of course there are no strings tied to the job," put in the chairman suavely. "And this is a splendid chance to render a real service to your city."

"Then I'm with you," said Griffith. "If I didn't feel there was a chance to do something for the town, I'd be a fool to give up the business I've started, just for six thousand a year and every sharpshooter in town gunning for me. But I'd be a bigger fool if it wasn't clear from the start that if I take the responsibility I'm running the department—not some bird in City Hall."

"I'll see it's kept clear, young man if I have to dynamite this political organization to keep it clear."

It was old Paul Bailey who spoke up, harshly, as was his wont.

"This town has had enough of a politically controlled police," he added.

There were some nods of assent down the line, along the table. None of them enthusiastic, though. Some men have a genius for making even normal decency unpalatable. But there were none who would have taken open issue with him, or with a policy of unhampered virtue, so soon after a reform election. And so the meeting broke up in a swirl of hand-gripping and congratulations for the new superintendent of police. He took them quietly.

Presently, as the little groups of men in the big room gathered in twos and threes for the low-voiced talk that seems an inevitable part of such gatherings, he was left for a moment standing by himself. Toward him, quite casually, edged presently a dignified figure.

"I'm glad you've taken the office," said the Honorable Bernard Cassidy. "It needs a competent young man like you."

"Thanks," said Griffith.

"It's going to call for all the judgment you have," pursued the Honorable Bernard. "You can't let things run wild the way they've been running. And you can't run a big city like a Sunday School, either."

Griffith nodded silently. The Honorable Bernard was evidently under weigh.

"As you Army boys would say, I suppose—" he smiled genially—"you can't handle it the way you'd mop up a machine-gun nest. But I suppose you realize as well as I do that some things have to be handled with riot guns and some things with white kid gloves. I feel sure we can rely on you to use both."

"I'm not quite sure that I get you, wholly, on this white kid glove business," said Griffith gravely. "But I'm not starting to run wild until I know my ground, if that's what you mean."

Neither particularly noticed Forstall Gaillard. The editor stood close by, absently working on a cigar to improve its draft. His whole attention, apparently, was centered on that recalcitrant roll of tobacco.

"Discretion is a fine virtue, my boy," said the Honorable Bernard sententiously. "Have a cigar."

He passed out a costly corona, belted with a brilliant band, and moved on.

He was a queer mixture, was the Honorable Bernard. He had started life as a laborer. The burly bulk of his early years was still with him. In the back wards they hailed him still as "Barney." He backed his politics with fluent tongue and facile fist.

Gaillard's cigar was drawing well, now. He looked through the smoke clouds at the new police superintendent, on whose brow a slight thought-wrinkle had deepened.

"Lesson Number One in the art of wedding politics and diplomacy," he observed with a quizzical grin.

"We live and learn," Griffith smiled, "though it's hard to tell just what we learn."

"I've learned a few things myself, colonel," said the editor, "since I tangled with politics. And I'm beginning to wonder already whether a newspaper that sponsors a winning political party has an asset or a liability on its hands."

GRIFFITH had not forgotten that conversation. He had relegated it to the minor pigeonholes of his brain, however, in the rush of reorganizing his department, when some days later a small package was laid on his desk.

In it he found Forstall Gaillard's card as he raised the cover of the pasteboard box

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inside the wrappings. Beneath the card was a folded clipping of a newspaper cartoon, culled from the midst of that recent hectic campaign. It portrayed a portly superintendent of police, in full uniform, cap in hand, bowing low before two figures. One was a gorgeously appareled and bedizened hussy labeled "Crime." Her jeweled hand rested on the arm of another portly figure, labelled "Politics."

And, wrapped in tissue paper beneath, lay a heavy pair of white kid gloves.

He was somewhat of a quiet humorist, in his way, at times, was Forstall Gaillard.

For a moment or two Richard Griffith gazed at the contents of the box. Then his eyes lifted from the gloves and focused for a space upon the wall opposite. He chuckled softly.

Into one of the drawers of his desk he thrust the package, and locked the drawer. He reached for the telephone; got Gaillard on the wire.

"I just got your package," he said. "I'm buying lunch to-day, old fox. But I've got a hunch you're going to have to buy a dinner before long."

"Glad you got 'em," chuckled Gaillard. "Keep 'em. You'll find you're going to need 'em."

"PLAIN-CLOTHES DETECTIVE DOMINGUEZ to see the chief," announced Doorman Casey.

"Bring him in," said Griffith.

It had been a busy month. The same old business of taking over a demoralized and slovenly regiment and putting snap in its backbone and guts under its belt with which Army life long since had made him familiar.

But with additions the Army never knew. With the problems of seeing that this or that city ward got representation in the roster of snap jobs. With genial suggestions here and there from the committee of men who had named him for the post.

Never an order. Never anything that could cause a man to take open exception without feeling that he was getting rough with his best friends. But just that feeling of invisible pressure. Faint, and always invisible. But there, undeniably. By now he knew that there were other considerations than mere efficiency in running a police department.

It was of this that Griffith was thinking that afternoon when Paul Dominguez, veteran detective, stood before him.

"What the trouble, Dominguez?" he asked. The man was one of the best on his plain-clothes staff.

"I've come to hand in my resignation, chief," said Dominguez.

"There's always a reason. What is it?"

"You're right there's a reason," said the plain-clothes man. "And you'll hear about it pretty soon from some one besides me."

"Let's hear it straight from the inside, man," said the superintendent.

"Well," said Dominguez, "I just slapped a guy out from under his hat outside in the corridor. I reckon I'm going to have some shyster lawyer on my back for assault and battery as soon as the captain at the first precinct lets this bird get to a telephone. I've just jugged him on the old vag charge to keep him holed up long enough for me to come in here and turn in my badge and gun. I got enough, chief. I'm through."

Griffith had listened patiently.

"I don't suppose you slammed him because you didn't like his neck-tie," he said, with equal patience. "Finish up your story. What's back of it?"

"The old lottery stuff," said Dominguez, wearily. "Last week I pinched this bird for selling lottery plays under my eyes. This mornin' the court discharged him. 'Insufficient evidence,' chief. He meets me in the corridor and he gives me the merry razz.

" 'What's the use makin' a fool of yourself?' he asks me. 'Tryin' to get in dutch wit' the big fellers?' he says. 'They're gettin' theirs,' he says. 'If they think you're tryin' to horn in on the big split, where'll you get off?' That's what he puts up to me, chief. 'The chief is gettin' his,' he says, 'an' the judges are gettin' theirs. You might as well get yours. Take your fifty a week and forget it.'

"That's what he puts up to me, chief, grinnin' at me. 'Arrest me again,' he says, 'and see what happens.' And then I slapped him loose from his hat, chief. I don't have to get mine that way. And no louse of a lottery peddler puts it up to me that way and gets away with it."

Here was action. Griffith met it, head on. He picked up the desk telephone and got the first precinct.

"Captain Gallagher," he called sharply. "That man Dominguez just vagged. Has

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he talked to his lawyer yet? No? Fine. Bring him into my private office and see he talks to nobody on the way. Yes. Now!"

He hung up.

"Sit down, Dominguez," he said. "This is going to be your busy day."

A moment later the prisoner was ushered in. At Griffith's crisp order the escorting patrolman withdrew.

"Listen to me, you," said the chief, as the door clicked shut. "You used your mouth too much in the corridor a little while ago. I know the whole business. Shut up!" This as the man sought to speak. "If I'd been there instead of Dominguez, you'd probably be in the hospital now. I'm having the charge against you quashed. And you're going to forget it. But get this straight. If you try to start anything about it, you might as well get ready for a long stay in the hospital. You won't know what hit you, but it'll hit all right. This hasn't got a thing to do with the law or your rights. I don't argue with a cockroach. I step on it. One peep out of you or any charge against this officer, out of this business, and you can pick your doctor. You'll need one."

He pressed a button on his desk. The door opened.

"Take this man to Captain Gallagher and tell him I said to have the charge against him quashed, and have him turned loose," he said curtly.

The prisoner and the patrolman filed out. The door closed behind them.

Griffith turned to Dominguez.

"Now," said he, "I want you to get to the bottom of this lottery business. When a crowd gets feeling strong enough to bawl out a detective in the headquarters corridor, it's time to get busy. Take all the time you need. Get inside the game, if you can. Get a job with 'em, if they don't all know you too well. I'll see you get emergency funds to play it with, if you have to. Pick your partner anywhere on the force, if you need one. Go to it and show me some results. I'll sign the transfer orders for any man or men you need."

With frank surprize the detective gazed at his new chief.

"Do I get you straight?" he asked. "You're getting ready to smash the lottery."

"Did you think I'm getting ready to give 'em a medal?"

The plain-clothes man was watching him keenly, Griffith noted. There was a moment of silence.

"You wont take offense if I ask you a question, chief? There's nobody here but us."

"Forget it's the office. Shoot."

Dominguez drew a breath with evident effort. His specialty was trailing crooks, not framing diplomatic phrases.

Then he blurted his question, flat-footed.

"They gettin' too strong—or ain't they kickin' in regular?"

Dull red rose above the superintendent's collar and traveled to his hair. His eyes narrowed.

"I'm new to this police game, Dominguez," said he. "But I don't need any interpreter to get what you mean. Suppose you and I start from the ground up.

"When I took this job I took it on the guarantee there were no strings tied to it. I meant exactly that. I know all the stuff that was said against this department during the campaign. I knew some of it was true. I'm just beginning to wonder how much. But I'm telling you, man to man, that what you've told me today makes the first time I've bumped into specific graft talk, since I took the job. Maybe it won't be the last. But it's the first. You hit a man today because he talked graft to you. Now you're asking me questions that don't sound pretty. Come clean with what you know about this lottery business. It won't hurt you with me, I'll promise you that."

Dominquez looked at his chief. Then he gazed pointedly at a filing cabinet in a corner, a careless litter of papers strewn on top of it.

Behind that litter of papers, he knew, was the tiny disc of a black rubber ear from which ran a wire to an outer office, where a police stenographer could take down every word spoken in the room.

"I may be askin' too much, chief," said he. "But—" he indicated the hidden dictaphone with a nod of his head— "is the outside boob-line cut off?"

Griffith smiled.

"Throw the switch yourself, if it isn't off. Though I think it is. You know where it is."

The switch was off.

"Thanks," said Dominguez. "I wanted to be sure. This is a new one on me."

"You're not the only one having new

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stuff pulled on him," said Griffith. "Now come clean."

And Dominguez came clean.

"Lotteries?" said he with voice of scorn. "The town's lousy with 'em from one end to the other. They call 'em lotteries, but they're nothing but cheap 'policy.' You got some sort of a run for your money in the old-time lottery. But this policy stuff is gettin' away with murder. I've figured it out on paper. The odds are eight thousand and fifty to one against the players."

"Can you get the whole dope on 'em in a month—dope that'll stick?" asked the superintendent. "With a good partner?"

"I don't need a month and a partner to give you the dope. I've got it now. There's about twenty big lotteries operating in the city today. Names and addresses any time you want 'em. They've got about five hundred lottery peddlers out, takin' bets every day, each man with his regular run of customers. They take bets from five cents up to the limit of your roll. The peddlers get twenty-five cents out of every dollar's worth of plays they sell. Some of 'em clean up from fifty to a hundred dollars a day. No, not a week, chief. A day! And they hold drawings every day but Sunday."

"Do you know many of these peddlers?" asked Griffith, sharply.

"Most of 'em," said Dominguez.

"Wait a minute."

The superintendent walked to a bookcase in his office. He took down a thick, calf-bound volume; riffled the pages for a moment.

"The law says possession of lottery slips or paraphernalia is *prima facie* evidence of intent to sell," he commented. "Can't you get 'em with the goods on 'em?"

"I can bring you in half a dozen patrol-wagon loads of 'em, every one with a pocket full of plays, any day you want."

"Then why in —— don't you do it?"

Dominguez laughed mirthlessly.

"Any time you say, chief."

"What's the matter with you, man. I don't think you're on their pay-roll, or you wouldn't have staged the show you did in the corridor. What's the reason you haven't rounded 'em up before?"

"Listen, chief. We're talking cold turkey now. No, they ain't payin' me a cent. They can't. I've got my little chicken farm outside the city. I can quit today and never worry about starving. I don't have to take coin from a bunch that strips the nickels from cooks and school-kids. I'd rather be able to look 'em in the eye and tell 'em to go straight to, than take all the dirty roll they turn. And it's some roll, believe you me."

"Well, shoot the works," said the superintendent.

"The real reason I ain't pinching 'em is that I ain't making a cock-eyed fool out of myself without orders. Get it straight, chief.

"Suppose I go out and round up a bunch of these birds. Now get me. I ain't accusin' anybody. But the word comes down from somewhere—somewhere pretty high. They get bailed out quick. They've got lawyers. Sharp ones. The cases come to trial. They all get five or ten or fifteen dollar fines. Just like that!

"That breaks a lottery man's heart, don't it—when he's cleanin' up fifty to a hundred fish a day.

"Or suppose I manage to get a limit fine plastered on one of 'em. He appeals the case. It comes up months afterward. It falls down flat on some —— technicality. The guy walks out. It didn't cost him nothin'. He ain't payin' the lawyers. But the Big Guy on top is payin' 'em monthly retainers."

"Who's this 'big guy,' Dominguez?"

"That's one thing I can't tell you. I don't know. But believe me, I know he's there. And the little peddlers his lawyers get loose, they give me the merry razz. Like today. Mainly I stand it. But I was feelin' sore today, and that bird sure got my goat. Tellin' me it looked like I was 'tryin' to butt in on the big money that you and the judges are gettin'.' I ain't sayin' he's right, chief. But I'm sayin' it looks like some part of what he says is right. The court record of lottery cases does its own talkin'."

Griffith was meditating deeply.

"But that lottery law—" he began.

Again there was no mirth in the detective's laugh.

"That State law!" he said sardonically. "Look it over. These same birds tell me they paid good money to get it drafted like it is. The fine is the joker, chief. You don't see nothin' in that law about keepin' a man in the hoosegow sixty to ninety days on conviction, do you? You bet you don't. Yet that's the only thing will stop lottery. Not these chicken-feed fines for guys rollin' in easy cash."

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"Looks to me like time to start something," mused the superintendent.

"Just a minute, chief," spoke Dominguez. "On the level, ain't there been anybody up here to talk split to you?"

"I can't get mad after what you've just told me," said Griffith. "But I'll have to ask you to take my word for it. Nobody has been to see me about any 'split' in anything."

"Well," said the detective, "if you really want to start something, I can promise you I'll smoke some of their fixers out of the woods for you inside of a week or prove somebody a liar."

"Start your smoke," came the orders, snappy, clean-cut, decisive. "Hit the grit. Rake this town clean. Bring in every lottery man you can find—and bring the evidence with you. I don't want any cases thrown out of court for lack of that. You might start with the bird you tied with in the corridor today, if it'll give you any satisfaction. And no matter what anybody says to you, remember this: I'm superintendent of this department for four years, anyway. I'll back you to the limit, and then some. Sit down there a minute."

Griffith rose and went to a filing case where rested some lithographed forms. He pulled one out, filled in certain spaces with a fountain pen and pushed it toward Dominguez. It was a commission as captain of detectives.

"My signature and the date go on that at the end of this week, if you've made good on the job," said he. "You know what that means for pay, and pension when you retire to that chicken farm of yours. Now hop to it."

"Watch me, chief," he said. "There's going to be some smoke to watch. And you better keep an eye on the guys who'll call on you after the smoke starts."

He strode out of the office with a glint in his eyes that boded action.

Forty-eight hours later, the barred doors of the various precinct stations had opened to receive close to two hundred men charged with the violation of the lottery law.

In envelopes neatly ticketed on the superintendent's desk lay the evidence in every case—long sheets of lottery plays, thick packets of narrow paper slips stamped with the winning "gigs" of the current day's drawings.

Dominguez had created considerable smoke.

The newspapers created more.

For the promptitude with which some two hundred arrested men had found bail and legal defense—men charged with the same offense—men of obviously cramped means—this made news as good as the wholesale round-up itself.

"LOTTERY RING" is a lovely brace of words to start an eight-column streamer. Any copy-desk man can tell you that.

AMONG the superintendent's callers, that second day, was old Paul Bailey.

"I have come to tender my congratulations," he said, his voice as harsh as ever. "And I wish to offer the suggestion that you keep up the good work until a certain gentleman is forced to call upon you."

"Do you mind naming him?" asked Griffith.

"It would be a luxury to give you the name I have in mind," said the leather-faced old war-horse of reform. "But it is a luxury I can not yet in justice afford. The reports of my agents investigating for the Citizens' League have given me good grounds for suspicion. But suspicion isn't evidence. I would only suggest, Mr. Griffith, that when certain men approach you in regard to this lottery affair, as they undoubtedly will before long, you insist on dealing with a principal instead of an agent."

And old Paul Bailey stamped out of headquarters, the same grim dragon of virtue he had been through nearly a score of years of civic battle.

"That makes two," Griffith was thinking. "Dominguez and Bailey. Both of 'em looking for a nigger behind this little old woodpile. Now, I wonder——"

But at that moment his private desk telephone rang.

It was Forstall Gaillard on the wire.

"I suppose you want to collect that dinner tonight," he chaffed. "My city room crowd is running around in circles since you started this lottery round-up."

"Not quite yet, old fox," said the superintendent. "But I've got a hunch you'd better begin to save for it."

"Sorry it can't be like those dinners in Paris after the Armistice," joked Gaillard. "No champagne at five francs the quart, these degenerate days."

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"Lay off. The war's over," pleaded Griffith.

"That war is," said Gaillard. "But the one you're in now hasn't really started yet. Has Hymie Montague been to see you?"

"What's he got to do with it?"

"You'll learn presently, *hombre.* Just stay with 'em. That's all."

"That makes three," said Griffith to himself as he hung up. "Dominguez, Bailey and Gaillard. Two with hints and one with a name. Getting warm. We'll have a little more smoke in the bushes and see what pops out."

IT WAS old stuff to Hymel Montague.

That legal buckler of the oppressed, defender of those unfortunates high and low who were harried by a police force heartless and vindictive, had seen police superintendents come and go and come again.

Out of his reading in recent years he had even coined a *bon mot* about it.

"The new chiefs come, the old chiefs go, but the graft goes on forever," he would assure the more select of his clients, as they sat in the privacy of his office.

Gone were the days when "Hymie" rated as an ambulance-chaser and took his fees in whatever his currency-lacking clients possessed.

"That bird has more guns and umbrellas and diamonds than a pawn-shop," one caustic brother-member of the bar had remarked during the earlier period of Hymie's practise. He came close to literal truth.

But that was all far behind for Hymel Montague, attorney and counselor-at-law, who these days rarely appeared in court. He had junior lawyers, now, to attend to such details as collections. He had a pleader or two for the jury stuff. He had office lawyers to do the necessary digging in thick volumes of statutes.

Mostly he sat in his big swivel chair in an office with three very private ante-rooms entering in upon it. And for those who came before him with the price—always with the price; trust Hymie for that—he was a most efficient microscope to discover holes in laws that would have been embarrassing had they been as waterproof and hog-tight as a confident public had hoped and believed. All the public had done was to pay and honor the men who drew up those laws.

There were those, even, who said that Hymie, working through certain of the weaker brothers of a much-bedeviled Legislature, saw to it that certain laws were drawn with carefully camouflaged holes. But then, success has ever bred envy. And Hymie was nothing if not successful. So much so, that he had even stopped wearing the big diamond ring and stud of his earlier years. Such advertising was necessary no longer.

So Hymie stepped from his car of quiet magnificence, outside the building that housed Headquarters, and sought audience with the superintendent of police. It was granted.

"I'd like to talk to you privately, chief," he said.

"If your reputation can stand it, I guess mine can," said the superintendent.

He rose and closed the doors of his inner office. The ball seemed to be opening according to schedule. Evidently Gaillard knew what he was talking about.

"Speaking as one gentleman to another, chief," said Hymie as he took seat and carefully arranged the crease of his trousers. "I'm going to ask you if this interview is quite private. No offense, I hope. But no dictaphone business, y' understand."

"Private as the tomb," Griffith assured him. "There is a dictaphone in the office, but it's disconnected—as you'll observe if you look. You might even cut the wires if you wish. It won't hurt in the least. I'm going to have it framed tomorrow, anyway."

"Framed?"

"Yes. We've got plenty of public telephones. But I think that's the only public dictaphone in America."

Hymie grinned. So did the superintendent. But there was a trace of tightness about the corners of the Griffith grin that some of his old *compadres* would have recognized.

"I've dropped in," began Hymie with elaborate casualness, "to see you about this lottery business."

"They all seem bailed out and happy," said Griffith.

"Oh—those babies!" The Montague wave of the hand disposed of them, utterly. "They're just the hired men. I'm here on the big stuff, chief."

"It's your move."

"Well, let's put it this way, chief. You're

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new to this job. You want to make a good showing, naturally. Keep the campaign pledges and all that. So what I wanted to show you was that you can handle it without half the trouble you've got on your hands now."

"That's mighty kind of you."

Hymie dismissed gratitude with a negligent wave of the hand.

"You've got a big future, chief," he said, softly. "And you're just starting. I hate to see a young man like you buck a game he can't win. I've been pretty close to the last four chiefs. I wanted to show you how easily it can be handled right."

"I'm listening," observed Griffith in the brief pause.

"Then let's talk plain, chief. As a lawyer I can tell you that the way the lottery law is drawn nobody can break up the game. I know. It's my business to know. If you've watched the way the cases run, you know they're taken care of. No use breaking your neck butting a stone wall. So I came up to find out if you'll listen to reason. A very satisfactory working agreement is possible."

"I'm new to this—and I'm still listening," said the superintendent.

"Well, put it this way. You've got to make a showing, like I said. So a certain man will guarantee that your officers can make, say, twenty-five arrests a month. Vary the number occasionally. But that'll be the average. And let, say, fifteen of 'em on an average result in convictions. We'll even make it twenty, if you feel you need it. That keeps your record clear. No political opposition can do anything against a record like that."

"And what do I do in return for this?"

Griffith's face was innocently receptive.

"Just lay off these wholesale round-ups, chief."

"That's all?"

"Absolutely all."

Richard Griffith drew a long and quiet breath. This *was* distinctly new stuff to him.

"Keep your shirt on and play up," he admonished himself. "Now's the time for real poker."

"You've talked business with me," he said, low-voiced. "Now I'm going to be equally frank with you. What's there in it for me?"

No cat with a canary-decorated interior ever purred more blandly than Hymie Montague.

"I like to do business with a business man," he approved. "The man I mentioned says that if you'll agree to that program I've just outlined, you'll get a plain envelope marked 'Personal and Confidential' by mail, once a week. It will be mailed on varying days. It goes to any address you care to give, changeable whenever you telephone me. In it will be five one-hundred-dollar bank-notes—and they won't be marked."

Griffith meditated a moment.

"Too little," said he. "When I get mine, Mr. Montague, I get enough to make it worth while. Your lottery is making somebody around twenty thousand dollars a day. Don't let's waste time talking chicken-feed."

"Good men come high," mourned Montague. "And remember a lot of expenses come out of that twenty thousand. I'll be frank with you, chief. I might bargain, but I won't. My authority goes up to one thousand dollars a week, but no more. That's the limit. We won't haggle. Does it go for a thousand? I've got the first grand with me in my pocket now."

He reached for a monogrammed bill-fold.

"Wait a bit," said Griffith. "On just one condition is it going to go for anything. That's this. You bring the big guy here and he makes the deal with me, personally. I know you had to pave the way. But I don't do this kind of business with agents. Anything I agree to with the big guy, I stick to."

Perceptible agitation contorted Hymie's face.

"There ain't a chance," he protested.

"That shows how wrong your dope is," said Griffith. "Now listen very very carefully, old fox. You can get him here in mighty short time. You go straight from this office and tell him what I said. Tell him this, too: Tell him I happen to know exactly who he is. We won't mention any names here, now. But I know."

"The —— you know!"

"Mr. Montague, if you look up my record, you'll find mighty few men who've caught me bluffing. You're too old a hand at this game to believe a man can keep covered up forever."

Hymie's wrath, spurred by fear he sought to conceal, was mounting.

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"No boob cop ever uncovered the big guy," he sneered.

Griffith smiled imperturbably.

"The boob cop can make ten thousand fool breaks and still make good," he said sententiously. "But the wise bird only needs one slip to spill the beans. And you first heard that so long ago you know it's the dope. You tell the big guy for me he made that slip. He may not remember it. But he made it. Now trot along and carry your message. I'll see him here. Right here."

"There ain't a chance, I'm telling you. He may meet you outside somewhere, though I doubt it. But in here——"

"Right in here, old fox," interrupted the superintendent. His poker face and his poker nerve were with him now—chilled and inscrutable. "When I started this round-up, Mr. Montague, I knew exactly what I was doing. I didn't push *that* particular button to call a hired man or an office boy. I see the big guy here, or there's trouble."

"But I'm handling all that for him, I tell you."

Hymie's wrath was sunk in acute worry. He was almost tearful.

"Listen," he pleaded, "do you get my position if I have to go and tell him you won't deal with me?"

But that was a bad slip and a wide opening. Into it Griffith thrust mercilessly.

"I'm not going to lose any more sleep over your position than you'd lose over mine if I was in a jam," he said curtly. "And while you're carrying my message, you tell him this for me, too. If he isn't here in my office by four o'clock this afternoon, both you and he will be under arrest. I may not be able to convict you. I'm no lawyer or judge. But it'll make a —— fine story when the charges get to the newspapers. And the interview I'll give. The public can take its choice whom to believe. You know who a bunch of 'em are going to believe, old fox. Especially when I shoot a little evidence I've got. Now get busy. Four o'clock this afternoon. Keep it on your mind. It's important—for you and the big guy, both."

As the door closed behind Hymie, Griffith leaned back in his desk chair. Through his brain swift thoughts were wheeling.

"And I used to think poker was the world's greatest bluffing game," they ran. And then, "One thousand fish a week!" he meditated. "Fifty-two thousand iron men a year. And the city pays me six thousand to be decent. The guy that wrote that good old book 'Why Boys Go Wrong' could learn something here."

From his pocket he extracted a black and stubby brier, stuffed and lighted it, and gazed thoughtfully at the wall opposite. He swore softly beneath his breath. His thoughts were racing again.

"Nickels from cooks and school-kids," they flashed. "Square cops called down to their face and kidded by lousy crooks. And all I've got to do is sit pretty and pull fifty-two thousand a year to let 'em keep it up. With a showing. Don't forget that showing for the poor old double-crossed boob public."

He puffed vigorously. Oddly enough, his thoughts had shifted from the lottery mess. Against the background of blue-gray pipe-smoke there grew a memory of a slashed and bullet-torn figure, empty revolver hanging in its hand. A voice silent these many years sounded in his memory.

"Why don't I want you to bury me? So the buzzards'll eat me! I don't want to rest under any ground that has your kind of double-crossing vermin crawling on top of it!"

Griffith's hand clenched involuntarily. And his jaws. The clatter of his pipe to the floor brought him out of his thoughts. He spat the splintered bits of black rubber from his lips. His teeth had shattered the bit.

He was a very new superintendent of police.

"Now I wonder," he thought, "just who in the —— is going to walk through that door at four o'clock?"

But then, poker wouldn't be poker, if you knew in advance what would happen every time you bluffed.

IT WAS three o'clock that afternoon when his private telephone rang.

"You know who this is talking," spoke the guarded voice of Hymie Montague. "He says he never did it before, and he ain't starting now."

"Tell him for me he'll never start any younger," said Griffith. "And he starts or I start. I'm standing pat on what I told you. The whole works."

"Wait a minute," pleaded the voice. The

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telephone grew silent for a space. Then——

"We'll be down in a few minutes."

"I'll be waiting for you."

Griffith hung up. A quiet smile twisted his lips. There was an edge of steel to it.

Presently appeared the cropped head of Doorman Casey.

"Two gentlemen to see you, sir," he said.

"Show them in."

They entered, Hymie Montague in the lead. They waited until the doorman withdrew.

"How are you, chief?" spoke Hymie with nervous cordiality. "I don't think our friend needs any introduction."

"No," said Griffith, crisply. "He doesn't."

Nor did he.

For the man who stood at Montague's shoulder, burly, red-faced with wrath, dignity struggling with anger, was the Honorable Bernard Cassidy.

"I'll wait for you gentlemen outside," said Hymie.

"It might be as well," assented the superintendent.

As the immaculately tailored back of the lawyer passed out through the door, Griffith pressed a button.

"I'm not to be disturbed by anybody under any circumstances until I call you, Casey," said he to the answering doorman. "Not until I come out and give you other orders. Understand?"

As Casey stepped out, closing the door behind him, Griffith rose from his desk and turned key in lock.

"Now," he said, "you can go ahead and talk."

And the Honorable Bernard opened the ball.

"I don't know how far you think you're going to get by these rough-house tactics," he began. He held his voice low with difficulty, as his rage mounted. "The only reason I'm here is that Montague tells me you're willing to listen to reason, barring this foolishness about seeing me in person."

"Lord, what a pot to rake in on a bluff!" was what Griffith was thinking.

But he spoke evenly.

"You're here because Montague told you what would happen if you didn't come," he said. "But we'll pass that just now. I told Montague I'd keep any agreement I reached with you."

"I don't concede you could get away with anything," rasped the Honorable Bernard. "But since you've talked agreement, let's get down to cases. You can take my word for it, in spite of any threats you make, the position of the interests you're attacking is safeguarded all along the line."

"You mean, I take it," said the superintendent softly, "that the lottery ring has the law where it wants it, until that law is amended."

"I didn't come here to discuss law-enforcement or amendment," Cassidy husked. "But if by any chance you're counting on having that law amended next session of the State legislature, you'll be making your fight as a private citizen—not as superintendent of police."

"Why?" Griffith's voice was silken. "I have no intention of resigning."

"Your intentions won't have anything to do with it. Now get me. Montague's offer still stands with my personal guarantee. We'd rather do business with you than fight you. If you're out to hog it, I'll raise the ante to fifteen hundred—but that's the outside limit. It's five hundred more than any chief ever pulled down before. But if you want to fight beyond that, we'll give you your bellyful of fight, young man. 'Twould be a pity for a promising youngster like you to get impeached before he got his chair warm on his first public job."

"Impeached?"

"That's what I said. You'll come up to the lick-log with us, or you'll go out under charges."

"Charges?" Again Griffith's voice was silken with courtesy.

"Charges by men whose word is as good as yours—and backed by evidence you'll have a —— of a time breaking down. You're new to this game. We're not. If we break you, you wouldn't be the first man we've broken. We pick our time. We get evidence that sticks. And we always get the man we start after."

"Whether he's guilty or not?"

"You said it. I'm glad you're learning," said Cassidy. "But don't misunderstand me. I'm not here to declare war. That's for you. I'm showing you the easy way out with a fine stake saved up when you quit the job."

"I wonder," said Griffith, softly, "if you ever think of those poor ——s you keep broke playing a sucker game with those eight-thousand-to-one odds against 'em?"

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"There's no law compels 'em to play."

"Or the men who'd have made decent police officers if you hadn't made double-crossing crooks of 'em."

"There's no law makes 'em take what's offered."

"No," agreed the superintendent. "But from what I've seen these last few minutes, if there's no law, there's a black-jack. And you don't hesitate to swing it."

The Honorable Bernard scowled redly.

"Your argument doesn't hold water, you see," explained Griffith smoothly.

"I'm not here for high school debate," growled Cassidy. "You can do what your predecessors in office did, or you can take what's coming to you. You may remember the day we picked you, in the City Reform League executive committee. I told you then there were some things in your job that had to be handled with white kid gloves. This is one of 'em."

"The Reform League. Oh, yes." There was bitter irony in the words. "Do you know," continued Griffith, gently now, "I never realized before how very right you were."

"Glad you realize it now."

The Honorable Bernard rose.

"Do I understand you're with us, then, on that fifteen hundred a week basis?"

A joyous ring was in Griffith's voice as he answered that.

"I'm with you from the opening bell to the last round," he said. "You can understand I'm with you to the finish. You can understand I'm taking your advice, old fox. I'm handling this with white kid gloves."

A grin of pure delight had spread across his face. He opened a drawer in his desk. From it he pulled the tissue-paper-wrapped gift of Forstall Gaillard.

"Lucky I had 'em waiting," said he.

He drew them on.

"They fit," he smiled happily. "Old fox, they fit!"

"Going crazy again?" hoarsely asked the Honorable Bernard, edging toward the door.

"I think I am," said the superintendent, looking up from his task of pushing a heavy pearl button through heavy white kid. "Oh, by the way, the key's in my pocket. You heard my orders to the doorman."

"See here—" began Cassidy. For the gleam in Griffith's eyes was unmistakeable now.

"I expect your boot-licker Hymie will make a fine case of assault and battery out of this," Griffith broke in upon him. "It'll be a pleasure to go on the witness-stand about it, if it gets that far. They tell me in the back wards that you're some little bear-cat of a rough-house artist in a pinch. This is the pinch, old-timer."

Lightly he stepped toward the Honorable Bernard.

His white-gloved fingers seized that gentleman's nose. They twisted it sharply. The other hand left red insignia as it smacked open-palmed upon the Cassidy cheek.

"If you've got any guts left in you, you blood-sucking cootie, let's go!" he said.

The Honorable Bernard's reputation as a rough-house artist among the nose-punching bravos of the back wards had not been won idly. It was backed by achievements. He rushed and swung.

That swing whistled through empty air. A second later Cassidy was temporarily blinded as the heel of Griffith's hand crushed the Cassidy nose upward, to the accompaniment of stinging tears and intolerable pain.

"That," grinned Griffith, "helps a little. I feel lots better."

Again the Honorable Bernard's fists flailed. One of them landed in a glancing head-blow that rocked the superintendent to his heels with the sheer weight of the bulky body behind it.

Then it was that Cassidy found himself fronting a man gone coldly berserk.

Swing and jolt and upper-cut thudded home—and ever behind them glinted the light of eyes that blazed with the chill gleam of polar ice.

Outside the door a frantic lawyer grew incoherent at the muffled sounds that seeped through, as he stood backed in a corner by Doorman Casey, whose ear was cocked keenly for thud and bump and smash—and who knew his orders.

Presently the door of the private office was unlocked. Doorman Casey was summoned within. He found some splintered furniture. With difficulty he identified, slumped in a corner, the form of one whose flattened nose, split lips and closing eyes bore little resemblance to that figure of burly dignity the political meetings of the back wards knew as the Honorable Bernard Cassidy.

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"Bring in that crooked shyster Montague," came the quiet order. "Have him take this thing out the back way. Then pick up the pieces around here. Keep everybody out until you've done it. And Casey, you'll oblige me if you'll forget this. That, over there—" he pointed to the slumped figure, now stirring slightly—"probably won't want to remember it, either."

"Yes, sir," said Casey, the perfect doorman. And he relapsed from discipline for the first time in a long and honorable, if inconspicuous, police career. "You won't mind my sayin' it must have been a —— of a fine scrap, sir."

"It was," said his chief.

"THANKS for coming over."

It was Forstall Gaillard speaking, that same evening, in his own private office. "I couldn't get over to headquarters myself, and I'm hearing strange whispers, Griffith."

"Is there anything you newspaper birds don't hear?" asked the superintendent.

"Lots. But just now we do hear that a certain political figure is in a private hospital taking the rest cure for nervous breakdown. And between you and me, that big bog-trotter doesn't know what nerves are."

"He knows what nerve is, all right," grinned Griffith. "But do you mind telling me what you're printing?"

"Not a word unless you're anxious to talk. He sends out word he sees no reporters. And from what my headquarters man says, it looks like it's up to you. Though I'll be honest with you, we haven't got enough to base a story on and feel safe."

"See here," said Griffith. "I'm going to trust you the limit. If I show you something you'll promise not to use it unless some charges are filed against me?"

"I promise," said the editor. "What is it?"

From an inner pocket the superintendent drew some sheets of typewritten paper.

"Read that," he said briefly. "And don't ever forget what you promised. I'll release you if I find I can't handle this any other way—but I think that bird has paid pretty nearly enough."

Long and low sounded the editor's whistle as he read.

Questioningly he looked at the superintendent when he finished the reading.

"The whole wide world seemed to know about that office dictaphone of mine," said Griffith. "So I left it there, disconnected, and had another one installed. With my old Army orderly sergeant, who's an expert stenographer, taking notes, and two other witnesses I can trust listening in with him."

"That'll come handy if they try to start something," said Gaillard.

"I don't think they'll try," grinned Griffith. "I sent a carbon copy to the Honorable Bernard at the hospital!"

"And say, I nearly forgot," he said a moment later, as he rose to go.

He reached into his pocket. His hand emerged with a small package. He laid it on the editor's desk. There was a moment of silence as Gaillard opened it.

"You handled it with kid gloves, all right," he chuckled, as he gazed at the wreckage of once-white leather, that lay split and stained and crumpled before him. "Man, what a story! How the —— did you ever come to do it?"

But there the superintendent of police fell down.

He was a very new superintendent of police.

How was he to find words to explain to another man that out of long-dead years had come to him a vision of a swaying figure that suddenly braced to hurl an empty revolver into the sneering face of a Honduran general, far south among the mountains near Tegucigalpa?

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THE THREE PALLADINS

A Four-part Story
Part One

by Harold Lamb

[*Author of "The Road of the Giants," "An Edge to a Sword," etc.*

Who can read the wisdom of the stars?

On the highway the war-horse picks its way, listening for the word of command of its master, the warrior.

The rider lifts his eyes, guiding his course by the stars. For a hundred ages of men the stars have pointed the way to wanderers: but who can read aright the message of the stars? Who can foretell what lies beyond the turn in the highway?

I

THE SHADOW

THE gong in the palace courtyard struck the third hour of the morning, awakening Mingan, prince of Cathay, from what would otherwise have been his last sleep.

He was a boy of fifteen, and the echoes of the gong had not died in the upper corridors of the slumbering palace before he was wide awake, before he had slipped from his teak pallet and opened the lid of the ebony chest beside it.

The day was the fifth of the fifth moon, and it was to be a feast day—the feast of Hao, in mid-Summer of that year of the Ape, by the Chinese calendar, otherwise the year of Our Lord 1190. But what had aroused Mingan was the recollection that at dawn the old emperor would assemble the court and ride forth on the customary hunt of the festival of Hao.

The hunters would go from the palace, out of Taitung—the Western City—to the Western Gate of the Great Wall, and beyond, to where Cathay ended and the wide desert began. Mingan wished to be ready in plenty of time. He was quivering a little with excitement—and the damp air that swept through the open arches of the sleeping chambers—as he took out from the chest the new garments he was to put on.

And then he saw the shadow.

Inside the entrance to his room stood a screen, placed there so that evil spirits might not have easy access, because demons must walk in a straight line and can not turn corners. In the corridor outside the screen a lantern was hung. Athwart the embroidered silk of the screen was now the black figure of a tall man whose head was bent a little forward.

Mingan smiled—he hardly ever laughed—thinking that it was one of the men-at-arms on guard in the upper halls, who had fallen asleep. The figure, however, held no spear, nor did it wear the helmet with the dragon crest of the Liao-tung guardsmen, who came from Mingan's province on the northern coast and were the picked men of the emperor's host. As he watched, the figure advanced a step, and Mingan knew that it was a man standing against his screen, listening. A cupbearer or slave might, perhaps, do that. Many such were paid to listen at doors in the imperial palace—Mingan had surprized them more than once, because the boy had been bred in the northern forests and could move as quietly as a panther when he chose. He wondered who paid them to do it.

Mingan put on the new garments, the soft boots, the silk tunic and wide, nankeen trousers, the over-robe of yellow and cloth-of-gold, and lastly the black velvet hat with its peacock feather—the insignia of

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manhood and nobility that he was to wear for the first time that day.

By now the man at the screen had come into view around the end, and proved to be a Cathayan of unusual stature, clad altogether in white, his head shaven.

"The Servant of Mercy," breathed Mingan, and no imaginable devil could have been a less welcome visitor in that place and hour.

Because the Servant of Mercy was the executioner of the court, serving the emperor by strangling culprits whose rank made them immune from beheading, Mingan's heart leaped and struck up a quick beat, akin to the roll of the kettle-drums of the mailed cavalry of Liao-tung whose regimental emblem the prince wore and whom he should command in a few years.

Without a sound Mingan moved backward, and out of the tall window that gave access to the balcony of the tower where he was quartered. There was only the one door to his room, and there was no other entrance or exit to the balcony than the window. Leaning against a carved pillar, Mingan observed the Servant of Mercy advance soundlessly to the bed, feel of it and peer around the ill-lighted chamber. The quilts in which the boy had slept were still warm.

"*Wan sui*—live for a thousand years!" The executioner whispered. "Ye Lui Kut-sai Mingan, Bright One of the North, Prince of Liao-tung, it has been decided that you must go in this hour to the guests on high, to face the honorable ones, your exemplary ancestors. Are you afraid?"

Mingan had seen two of his kindred take the happy dispatch by poison put into their wine cups, and he was afraid. The tall man was listening again, his head on one side. And then he was moving toward the balcony, where he had heard the prince breathing. From his right hand hung the loop of a silk cord.

THE boy's body did not move, but his mind probed for the reason of his death—secret, and bloodless, by token of the strangler's cord.

His uncle, the emperor, had never noticed him; his father and his Liao-tung mother were dead: Chung-hi, the heir and son of the emperor, was his classmate—a powerful youth, given to brooding and superstition.

Chung-hi had been good-natured with Mingan, had gone on escapades with him, when the two princes went out incognito and joined the ranks of the court troupe of actors, or played on the ten-stringed lute in the gardens of the courtesans.

Now Mingan's studies were at an end, and his tutors had announced to the emperor that Mingan was a little inclined to shirk his books for the hunting-chariot, at night, when he climbed down from his room, and drove his matched horses out of the walls of Taitung. He was expert in sword-play, well-versed in the wisdom of the sages, and history.

One of these old proverbs came into his mind as he pondered.

"A hunted tiger jumps the wall," he said in a low voice.

The Servant of Mercy stepped through the window, made the triple obeisance of respect, and paused.

"An intelligent man recognizes the will of the heavens," said he.

"Panthers," rejoined Mingan steadily, "eat men in the northern mountains, and," he added reflectively, "panthers eat men in the southern mountains too. Yet it is written in the books that for everything there is a reason."

He perched himself on the railing by the pillar.

"Tell me who gave the order for my death. I will never speak of what you say."

The Servant of Mercy moved a little nearer, and the ghost of a smile touched his thin lips. No, Mingan would not speak hereafter. Yet now!

"Pledge your slave," said he, "that you will make no outcry, and I will relate the cause of my coming."

"I pledge it you."

"Then, O Prince of Cathay, look into the sky behind you and see the cause."

Mingan turned a little, so that he could still watch the man in white. Hovering at the horizon was a red moon, as if a film of blood had been drawn over a giant eye of the sky.

Miles distant, outlined against the moon, Mingan could trace the line of the great wall. That night he had dreamed of the wall. Standing alone on the summit he had labored at casting down rocks at a mass of beasts that had run in from the vast spaces of the steppe and the desert of Gobi, to leap and snarl at him—the beasts changed to a pack of horsemen clad in furs, figures

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that grinned at him and rode their shaggy ponies up the sheer side of the wall——

Mingan knew now that he had been thinking of the men from the country of the Horde that lay even beyond the hunting-preserves of the emperor. He had often been tempted to drive his chariot out to the steppe to catch sight of these barbarians, who—his tutors said—were no better than beasts. Perhaps—

"What mean you?"

He slid his boots from his feet and braced his toes in the lacquer work of the balcony.

"Your birth-star, ill-fated one, shines in the favorable constellation of the Lion, betokening power and success to you. The star of the dynasty of Cathay has entered into the region of ill-omen, foretelling disaster. So, that the prophecy of the stars may not be fulfilled, your death has been decreed."

"By whom?"

Instead of answering, the executioner cast the loop of his cord at the boy's head. But Mingan gripped the pillar with both hands, and swung himself out, over the railing. His feet found holds in the lacquer work on the tower's side, and he let himself down swiftly, escaping the clutch of the executioner's hand.

Often in this way he had escaped his tutors, to snatch the forbidden joy of the stables and a ride under the stars.

For the nonce he was free; if the emperor was his foe, he would not be safe, even beyond the wall; if, however, some favorite in the court had sought his removal, now that he was about to assume his rank and ride with the armies, there was hope. Mingan had been taught to obey implicitly the will of the Dynasty, yet he had in him a wild streak that would not let him be taken easily. He shivered a little, as he felt a surging impulse to turn and flee. To run would be to reveal his movements; to stay where he was would be impossible.

Mingan folded his cold hands in his sleeves and walked slowly to the stables, beyond the gardens of the palace enclosure. Here a Manchu slave nodding beside the glow of a horn lantern, started up at sight of a young noble, clad in the dragon robe.

"I will ride," said Mingan composedly, "in a small, hunting-chariot. Harness two horses to the shaft. Make no noise, for the Court sleeps."

The Manchu held up the lantern to look keenly into his face. Recognizing the prince he hastened away. Often in the last months he had obeyed similar commands from Mingan, yet this time he was prompter than usual and the prince saw that the two matched horses were of the best.

"*Wan suil*" breathed the slave, making his obeisance. "Live for a thousand years."

As Mingan stepped into the chariot—a low, two-wheeled affair of light, gilded cedar—the man's glance fell upon his bootless feet. The slave hesitated, and put the lantern behind him.

"The gate of the palace enclosure is barred and guarded, by order of Chung-hi, the Discerning, the elder prince. Your servant dares to mention that the lane to the horse pastures behind the stable is not guarded. Drive with a loose rein and—forget not that the night air is not healthy for a Northerner."

Understanding the covert warning, Mingan nodded and turned his chariot slowly in the stable yard, until he reached the grass lane. Here he tossed the reins on the horses' backs and let them graze, while he slipped to the ground and walked back through the gardens, starting at glimpses of stone pillars and evergreens trimmed to the height of a man. He knew well the by-paths of the gardens and presently crossed a bridge over a miniature lake, entering a grove of plane trees where the shadow was like a heavy cloak over his head.

Feeling the tiles with his bare feet, he made his way to a wall illumined by the glow from an incense brazier. Taking fresh powder from the bowl under his hand, he dropped it on the smoking incense, and kneeled in front of the tablet of his ancestors that hung in this shrine.

"Honored Ones of the North," he whispered, bending his forehead to the tiles, "I, unworthy, have put upon my person the insignia of a warrior prince, casting aside the garments of childhood. In this hour I, inexperienced, will set my feet on the highway leading from the palace where my elders have taught me wisdom. It is my prayer that no act of mine will make it impossible for me to look into the faces of my illustrious sires with clear honor."

Nine times he made the *ko-tow*, and withdrew, satisfied. The bronze tablets hung in their places as always, the smoke from the brazier curled upward; no sign was vouchsafed Mingan that what he was doing was dishonorable. His senses were keyed to

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perceive any omen. All he saw was a gleam in the upper corridors of one of the residence palaces of the enclosure.

It was the only light visible, and he stopped to puzzle over it, realizing that it must come from the palace of Benevolent Youth, the quarters of Chung-hi, the heir-apparent. Chung-hi, then, like himself, was awake. Mingan wondered if Chung-hi had sent the Servant of Mercy.

Then, as he passed the stables again, he caught the glow of the Manchu's lantern, and drew closer. The slave seemed to be asleep, but Mingan knew that he could not have dozed so quickly. The face of the slave was composed, but from the breast of the man who had warned him the hilt of a knife projected.

The Servant of Mercy had traced him to the stables, had discovered that horses were missing, had slain the attendant, and then—what? Although nothing was to be heard, Mingan caught the reflected glimmer of lanterns moving toward the gate of the palace enclosure. Guards were already searching for him in that direction; there would have been just time for the executioner to arouse them and order them to the gate to stop him. Then it was probable that his chariot, in the back lane, had not been discovered. Listening intently, he could make out the crunching of the horses as they moved over the grass, and the faint *slap* of the traces.

Seconds were precious and he ran to the vehicle, caught up the reins, and urged on the horses. They were fresh, and he passed out of the lane to the pastures swiftly, turning here into a path that led to the highway running out of Taitung to the northwest. Once on the road, smoothed and beaten for the passage of the emperor that day, he gave the horses their heads and sped on through the darkness.

The moon had set and the brightest of the stars over his head was the planet of his birth. Mingan, feeling the damp of the dew on his face and the chill of the wind on his skin, wondered that men should so believe in the stars that they should be impelled to slay him because of this omen. It seemed ridiculous that he, cold, shivering, fleeing with throbbing pulse, should be destined to a higher fortune than the Dynasty.

And yet—he had been taught the stars never lied.

THE dawn had flooded the sky behind him when Mingan reached the Western Gate of the Wall of China, and found a hundred men-at-arms drawn up beside the barred portal. The captain in command informed him respectfully that orders had been issued from the Court that no one was to pass through the gate before the emperor, who was on the way to the hunt.

Mingan decided to wait where he was. If he went back, he would meet the cavalcade from Taitung; if he turned aside from the highway into one of the earth lanes, his chariot would be bogged down in the mud before he had passed beyond view. So he stood in the miniature chariot, to hide his bare feet, and let his horses breathe.

By the eighth hour of the morning, the gong on one of the gate towers was sounded and the hundred soldiers lifted down the massive bar, swinging open the iron-studded gates. Then they threw themselves down on their faces. A troop of horsemen bearing wands appeared around the first bend in the highway.

Mingan, being of royal blood, and in robes, kept his feet while the horsemen passed, saluting him. He watched a company of the palace guards march past with drawn swords on their shoulders, followed by the dignitaries of the Court, under canopies carried by slaves. Then, at the head of the princes of the blood, and the palanquins of courtesans, appeared the sedan chair of the Emperor.

The prince left his chariot and kneeled by the road, feeling his heart quicken as the sedan halted, and the side lattice was lowered at a command from within. The thin face and shrewd eyes of the Son of Heaven peered out at him. He heard the emperor ask his name, and the attendants answer.

"Young nephew," the modulated voice spoke from the opening in the yellow lacquer, "it was said to us that you had left our presence, during a revel of the night thus showing us disrespect, inappropriate in the young in years."

Mingan bent his head nine times.

"Live for a thousand years! I, presuming beyond my merit, ventured to await your passing, to pay my respects for the first time in the robe of a man."

"You are young to be a warrior and a

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councilor. Have you passed your examinations?"

Before Mingan could answer a sedan approached and was set down a few paces in the rear of the yellow chair that bore the monarch. From it dismounted Chung-hi, the heir apparent, a thick-set youth of twenty years with a broad, stubborn face. He bowed three times to his girdle and folded his hands in his sleeves.

"Live forever, O my father. Know that Mingan, my cousin of the northern forests, has been lacking in his studies, and has given himself overmuch to driving his chariot of nights, and to making melody with his lute."

The old emperor tapped gently with his fan against the opened lattice and the lines about his mouth deepened. The devils of sickness had been plaguing him of late and he felt that his years were numbered. Also, the astrologers had dared to point out that the star of his Dynasty was sinking, which troubled him.

"Why do you tell me this, Chung-hi?"

"Be it forgiven me, O beloved of the Dragon! Those who are enemies of Mingan would be affronted at sight of the boy, who is yet a student, appearing in robes; they might think him exalted by the ascendency of his star, and do him harm."

"Who are your enemies?"

The Cathayan turned to Mingan.

"I know not."

The emperor sighed. As his sight failed, he perceived nevertheless a growth of arrogance in Chung-hi, his son. Presently he looked up and began to question the heir-apparent as to what lay beyond the Great Wall. Taken by surprize, Chung-hi answered haltingly, proving himself ignorant of more than a smattering of geography and history, although he had just been appointed Warden of the Western Marches.

Realizing this, the emperor nodded to Mingan. "I will test your knowledge and so decide whether you are fitted to assume the duties of a warrior prince at our court. When was this wall built?"

Today Mingan was to have been examined by the old monarch on his studies. Now, however, he was caught leaving the palace before dawn, and he was forced to speak under the stolid stare of the elder prince.

"Thirteen hundreds of years ago, your majesty," he responded quietly. "It was built to keep out of Cathay the marauding tribes of the steppe and the desert of Gobi."

"What tribes?"

"In the steppes are the Taidjuts, who live by raising and stealing cattle and by largesse from your majesty's hand. They provide huntsmen for the time when the peoples of the world watch the Son of Heaven ride to the hunt."

In Mingan's thoughts was the question: Had the emperor ordered his death, or was it Chung-hi, or another?

"Beyond the Taidjuts?"

"Begins, O most wise of the sages, the desert and the people of the desert—Tatars, Mongols, the Jelairs of Turkish race, and the gipsies. The strongest of these are the Mongols, whose chief is Yesukai, and who are called the Brave. Of their homeland we know only that it is in the high prairies, by the Three Rivers. From there to the south they move their tents, which are their houses, thus giving their herds seasonal pasture. They number forty thousands of tents, and they are hostile to us——"

"Wherefore? Of what are you prating?" demanded the emperor testily.

"In your memory, O beloved of the Dragon, Kabul, khan of the desert tribes, was bidden to the court of Cathay, where he behaved like a wild boar. On his return he was given poison by servants of Cathay, and——"

"Enough!"

The man in the sedan waved his fan impatiently.

"The prince of Liao-tung," spoke up Chung-hi, "comes from the land next to the Tatars on the north and speaks their language. Surely he shows knowledge of them, when he is close to their counsels."

The emperor frowned slightly. The Mongols were a thorn in his side. He questioned Mingan on strategy and the art of war, and was answered readily.

A gleam of pleasure penetrated the faded eyes of the emperor.

"We," he said, "sitting as judge, decide that the youth Mingan is qualified for the decree of master of scholars, and councilor. Would there were more of his merit to defend our western marches against the raids of the people of the Horde. He has put to shame your learning, O my son, and you are appointed Warden of the Western Marches."

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His glance was an accusation, and the elder prince paled a little with anger.

"Lord of Ten Thousand Years," he responded, "while Mingan has spent his days in pondering books and shooting mock arrows, I have taken measures to safeguard your hunting, and the shaft sent from my bow will strike in the heart of Yesukai, khan of the Mongols, your enemy."

He hesitated, looking around at the bowed heads of the attendants, and lowered his voice so that Mingan could catch only snatches of what he said.

"By giving some gold to the Taidjuts—like Kabul, foe of your grandsire—nothing failed, and no one suspects—will not trouble your hours of pleasure."

Mingan thought only that Chung-hi had arranged for the Taidjut tribesmen to protect the wide area of the coming hunt, and that a blow against the Mongols was in prospect. He drew a deep breath, knowing that he had had a narrow escape, for if he had failed to satisfy the emperor, he would have been sent back to the Taitung palace, and guarded closely and before many hours had passed he would have received a second visit from the Servant of Mercy.

He suspected now that Chung-hi, not the emperor, had plotted his death, and now it would not do to return to Taitung. The heir-apparent had lost face in the examination before the monarch of Cathay and he would allow Mingan little time to enjoy his success. Within the Great Wall, there would be no safety for the Manchu.

The emperor turned to him, after dismissing Chung-hi, satisfied with the tidings the prince had whispered.

"It is the feast of Hao, of the fifth day of the fifth month. Speak then, and say if there is any award we can make in honor of your new rank as prince-warrior."

Mingan thought quickly, aware of the covert scrutiny of Chung-hi and the ministers of the elder prince.

"If the Son of the Dragon is pleased, my reward is more than enough," he said slowly. "Yet I crave one thing, to drive my chariot in advance of the imperial guard, to be courier this day for the coming of your benevolent presence."

"It is granted."

The emperor shook his sleeve and signed to the bearers to lower the side of the sedan and take up the poles. Chung-hi seemed satisfied with the request, and Mingan reflected that his enemy was in command of the imperial huntsmen, by virtue of his office as Warden, and that an arrow, loosed in the turmoil of the drive, would end his days as surely as the hand of the Servant of Mercy.

The voice of the old man reached him from behind the lattice.

"Swear to me, Mingan, that you will be faithful to the Dynasty and seek to build up by every act the greatness of Cathay, as the stone layers built up this Wall."

A rush of feeling swept over the Manchu, at the faint words of the oath administered to every one of blood kin to the emperor on arriving at manhood. The splendors of Pekin, the halls of the philosophers, the massive walls of a hundred cities, the never ending lines of junks on the rivers and the laden camels on the caravan routes—the myriad warriors he had watched at maneuvers during his childhood—these were some of the pictures that flashed through his mind. Cathay!

"I swear!" he cried, his voice unsteady, his heart thumping.

Chung-hi raised his fan to hide a smile.

So Mingan had the wish of his boyhood when he drove his chariot through the Western Gate, in advance of the wand-men and the court.

Not until the emperor's chair had passed did the guards of the gate venture to raise their faces from the dust.

"Live for ten thousand times ten thousand years!" they cried, holding up their spears.

A group of aged men in long robes, mounted on fat, ambling mares, looked up at the shout and fell to talking together, disputing with much head-wagging. The astrologers were debating hotly the honor shown Mingan, wondering how the youth was to win to greater dignity and the Dynasty fall into decay at the same time, when Mingan had sworn fidelity, and Mingan was known ever to keep an oath.

THE highway was broad and its surface level as a stone-paved courtyard. The horses were rested and drew the youth swiftly onward. They passed the villages of farmers that became more scattered as they began to ascend the foothills of the Kinghan Mountains.

Watch-towers, wherein beacons were placed ready for the torch, sped past them.

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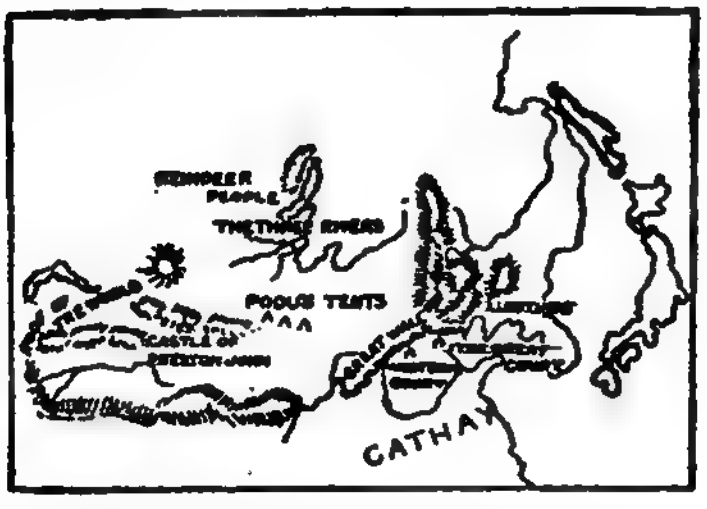
When the horses tired, Mingan changed at a post-station: at mid-day he changed to fresh beasts again, pausing only to drink a bowl of tea.

By nightfall he had put eighty miles behind him and had outdistanced the cortège of the emperor. He slept at an inn. He was a light sleeper and in the early hours of the morning he heard a clatter of hoofs on the highway. Listening, he made out that the rider halted only a minute at the post station near the inn; then the crescendo of hoof beats again, dwindling out on the road. Only a courier from a high official, on business of the emperor, would be given a horse at the relay station.

A messenger from the court had passed him. And the odds were that the message was sent by Chung-hi, Warden of the Western Marches. Was it merely routine business—that sped a rider through the small hours of darkness?

Mingan thought not.

He knew that Chung-hi, superstitious to the core, feared the omen of the stars. Besides, he was jealous of the Northerner, who might, under favor of the old emperor, rise to an important post in the army—perhaps to the command of the Liaotung swordsmen,



the élite of the Cathayan warriors. So Chung-hi sought to remove Mingan from his path, as a man might pluck a thorn from his foot. And Chung-hi, failing to find him at the stopping-place of the courtiers, fifty miles back, had sent a courier ahead—perhaps to the hunting pavilion that was to be the headquarters of the court the week of the great hunt, at the edge of the Taidjut lands—some sixty miles beyond the inn.

At daybreak Mingan was on the road again. Here he circled the shoulders of massive hills, rising into the region of evergreens, where the cool air struck his face pleasantly. His chariot rumbled lightly over gorges, spanned by arched stone bridges.

Mingan changed horses frequently, and sang as he sniffed the odor of the damp forest. He was too glad to be at liberty on the open highway to ponder the future.

Before he was aware of it, he had passed the road leading to the hunting pavilion. So he turned aside into a lane that would take him, as he fancied, to his destination. There were no houses to be seen, and the rolling country cut off his view of landmarks. He let the horses slow down to a foot pace. Presently he reined in and listened.

Faintly, he heard hoofs in the grassy lane behind him. After a moment the sound ceased. Mingan went on, around a bend in the trail, and listened again. The rider—only one horse was to be heard—was following him, because when the chariot moved, its axles creaking, the horse advanced, and when Mingan halted the rider proceeded with caution.

Mingan took up the short hunting-bow from the side wall of the chariot, and fitted to it an arrow from the sheath under his hand. Around the bend in the trail came a rider, but not the spy Mingan looked for.

Instead he beheld a youth of his own age in a ragged woolen cloak and leather tunic—a boy whose keen, black eyes went from the Cathayan prince to the horses of the chariot. The shaggy pony he bestrode was dark with sweat and all but spent.

"Your horse," the stranger said promptly. "Give me it—one of them."

Mingan was surprized to hear the guttural speech of a Mongol, and more surprized at the request, which was little to his liking. He saw that the other was armed like himself—a bow of tough wood, a sheath of arrows behind him at the saddle, a knife in his girdle. But the Mongol's bow was unstrung, his hands empty.

"Who are you and whence come you?" he asked quietly.

The Mongol heeded Mingan not. His head, browned by the sun, projected forward from high, square shoulders; the skin was stretched tight over the bones, and his dark eyes glowed as if from fever.

"Your horses are fresh," he responded curtly, "and I have need of a fresh horse. Loosen one from the shaft if you would live."

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"If you return not whence you came," Mingan warned in his fair Mongol, "I will give you this shaft in your heart——"

As he spoke the stranger flung himself bodily from the saddle of the gray pony, striking the ground on hands and knees. Involuntarily, Mingan loosed his arrow, but it glanced harmlessly from an empty saddle. Before he could fit another shaft to string the Mongol leaped into the chariot, seized his shoulders and bent him back over the front wall of the vehicle.

Mingan writhed and twisted in vain. He felt the bones of his shoulders click together, and a sharp pain shot through his back. Realizing that the Mongol was stronger than he had thought and would break his back in another moment, he groped for the hunting-knife in his girdle, pulled it free and thrust the point through the leather shirt of his adversary, below the ribs.

When the Mongol felt the steel tip in his flesh, his eyes, not a foot from Mingan's twisted face, glowed and his wide mouth set in a straight line.

"I am Temujin," he panted, "son of Yesukai, the Mongol khan, and I am stronger than you. Bear in with your steel, but I will slay you!"

The two boys glared at each other, until a red mist floated before Mingan's sight. He knew that if he thrust home the knife, the iron fingers of the Mongol would snap his spine. Each held the other's life in his hand, and Temujin seemed to exult in the conflict.

Suddenly the Mongol released his hold and stepped back, freeing himself from Mingan's knife.

"You are not a coward, like most Cathayans. Why should I slay you? Abide here and your horse will be brought back to you in the third hour of the night."

Mingan got back his breath slowly, and stood erect with an effort. He could have struck at Temujin with the dagger, but he had an idea that to try to do so would be a mistake. Temujin had judged correctly the intelligence and the honesty of his foe. Mingan noticed the poise of the other's lithe body, the rippling muscles of the wide shoulders under the sleevless tunic, and the polished, iron armlets that bound each powerful forearm of the Mongol. These, he fancied, had given the boy his name—Man of Iron.

Mingan put away his knife, stealing a glance at the dark stain that appeared on the other's tunic, and folded his arms in his sleeves. By heritage and training, Mingan kept both his dignity and presence of mind.

"We are going in the same direction, O Mongol," he said reasonably. "I may not abide here, so you shall ride in my chariot to the place you seek. Meanwhile, shall there be fellowship between us?"

In silence Temujin eyed him. Friendship, to a Mongol, had a deep significance. He made decisions quickly.

"*Tahil tebihou*, the bargain is struck. Drive!"

Mingan would have liked to parley a while—to know what the son of Yesukai was doing three hundred miles from the Three Rivers, his homeland.

"Your horse," he began——

Temujin stirred impatiently.

"The gray pony will follow, in time. The shadows are turning to the east: we have far to go. Take the reins!"

Although Mingan put the horses to a sharp trot, Temujin was not satisfied until they were whipped into a headlong gallop that set the chariot to plunging dangerously. He watched the road ahead steadfastly. Mingan studied him, when opportunity offered, from the tail of his eye.

"In the ebony box behind you," he ventured, "you will find rice, and fruit and quail meat. You are hungry——"

Promptly Temujin reached down, without shifting his scrutiny. He emptied the box by fistfulls, gulping down the food avidly, as if he had been without a meal for several days. Then he gripped the side of the chariot and planted his legs wide. Presently Mingan saw that he slept, on his feet. It was a cloudy day and the mountain slopes were swept by a chill wind, while a light rain drove in their faces. But Temujin slept on.

After a while Mingan allowed the horses to slow down to breathe and the boy opened his eyes at once.

"This is not the place. We draw rein to a ravine. The road from the Taidjut steppe runs through it to these hills. In the time milk takes to boil we will be there."

"What seek you in the ravine? If we are to ride together as comrades it is fitting that you should tell me."

Temujin, always sparing of words, explained swiftly, his voice falling into the

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deeper notes of a Mongol who speaks of vital things.

"Four suns ago a party of Taidjuts came to the tents of Yesukai while the most of our warriors were out on the plains hunting. Yesukai, my father, gave them seats at the fire on the guests' side, and milk and mutton and drank with them in fellowship. When they rode off, at dawn, they slew the boys who were guarding the horse herd at the tents and drove off the herd. Yesukai swore by Erlik, but he is old and the chill gets into his bones, so he called for one to pursue the thieves, and slay them."

As Temujin seemed to think this enough said, Mingan prompted him.

"How many were the Taidjuts?"

"Eight or nine."

"Where are your men?"

"I am alone."

"Why did you not rouse up the leaders of your tribes? You can not cope with so many warriors alone."

Temujin made no answer, and Mingan reflected that the Mongols would have thought it strange if the khan called for others to win back horses stolen from him, or if he had called back the *orkhons*, the heroes, from the hunt.

"There is peace between us and your emperor, O Cathayan," said the boy slowly. "If I had sent the boors from my household to pull down the Taidjuts, they would have become drunk and fallen upon some of your hunting parties. For this is the moon of the emperor's hunt. So said Yesukai, who is old, and wise."

Mingan hid a smile, but presently fell serious. If it became known that he had aided a prince of the Mongols against the Taidjuts, Chung-hi would accuse him of a crime. What was it that the Warden of the Western Marches had said of the Taidjuts? He had prepared some intrigue against Yesukai, with their aid.

"Here is the ravine," quoth Temujin, signing for the Cathayan to draw rein.

The trail they were following dipped sharply down into a wooded glade where it joined another road, marked by many hoofs, running east and west. This, Mingan knew, was the main trail from the Taidjut pastures to the Kinghan Mountains, whither many of the tribesmen had come to aid in the great hunt of the emperor.

The wind had ceased, and with it the mist of rain. Far out on the brown prairie the setting sun cast its rays in among the trees. Mingan saw, about a mile out on the Taidjut road, a mass of moving beasts, and the tiny glints that were the sun's reflection on spear tips.

"We have come in time," he said, and Temujin nodded silently.

III

A HOBGOBLIN AND A WOMAN

IT WAS the part of wisdom for Mingan to withdraw now, especially as the Mongol youth did not want the chariot to descend into the ravine, where its wheel tracks would be visible to the approaching horse thieves. Especially, too, when after a few moments he heard a neigh, and saw the gray pony trotting up.

It would not do for the Taidjuts to see him with Temujin, to bring word of what they had witnessed to the Cathayan Court. That they would reach the hunting pavilion safely he had no doubt. They must be bound thither with the captured horses, to sell to the Cathayans. And how could one boy—or two for that matter—armed only with a bow and knife overcome eight men full grown, well mounted and armed?

Temujin guessed what was in his mind.

"Blood will be spilled here," he said, "and Erlik, the lord of the under-world will welcome new souls to his court of darkness before night falls on the ravine. Turn to the left, and seek the road below you when you have gone three arrow shots, and you will reach the assembling place of the Taidjuts at the pavilion, if that is your wish."

As Mingan made no move to go, he added shortly—

"No man will know you have been with me."

But Mingan found that he did not wish to go. He was curious, and desired to see how Temujin would strive against the tribesmen. The boy's eyes were sunk in his head from weariness, yet the mist of sleep had cleared from them. He was not mad; still single-handed he was preparing to attack his enemies. Mingan's pulse began to throb, and he felt a thrill stealing through his veins, that was more than the exhilaration of driving a racing-chariot or the excitement of the chase. For the first time he stood where men would slay each other.

To Temujin, he knew, this feeling was an

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old experience. Born in the heart of the feuds of the great plain of the Gobi, the Mongol was older in experience than he, who had been weaned on books. And Temujin's quarrel was just.

"I will stay," Mingan said, under his breath.

And in a moment he was glad he had chosen so; he felt a great liking for the Mongol boy; at the same time his hands quivered, and his lips twitched.

Temujin looked at him sharply, grunted, and swiftly set to work tearing strips from his girdle to bind the muzzles of the chariot horses so that they would not neigh at the approach of the Taidjut beasts.

"What is your plan?" Mingan spoke in a whisper, involuntarily.

Temujin shook his head impatiently and signed for him to follow. Making sure that the three horses were screened by bushes from the trail below, the two boys scrambled down the bank and sought among the willows until Temujin found what he was looking for—a clear spring, about which were the ashes of former camp fires. He glanced out at the sun, now close to the horizon.

"Can you write words, O Cathayan?" His eyes were on the miniature silver jar of India ink, and the brush tied, as always, to the girdle of the prince.

As Mingan nodded, he continued.

"Then write these words: *Under this tree*"—hastily he ripped the bark from the bole of an aged chestnut with his knife, exposing the gray under-surface—"*will die the khan of the Taidjuts, a thief.*"

Swiftly Mingan dipped brush and ink fragment in the spring and traced the six Mongol characters, a hand's length high on the bare bole of the tree. As he did so the last rays of the sun passed from the branches over their heads, leaving the ravine in obscurity.

Temujin raised his head, hearing the hoofs of many horses drawing nearer, and pulled Mingan back through the willow clumps until they were hidden from the spring and the message on the tree. Then he strung his bow, tested the gut, and squatted down, placing between his knees the quiver he had taken from the saddle of his pony. Mingan had to make two attempts to fit the silk string of his bow into the notch.

Then he found that he had no arrows. Temujin gave him two and whispered:

"Some of the dogs will be out of sight, at the rear of the herd. We must not suffer them to escape, or the whole tribe will be raised against us, and our graves will be dug not far from here."

Mingan saw a rider trot up to the spring, dismount, ward off his pony from the water with a blow and kneel to drink. He was a broad man with massive shoulders; a sword as long as his leg, and wide at the head as a battle ax, hung from his belt.

Five others came up in a group and four of them followed the example of the leader. The fifth, who carried a bow ready strung and wore the eagle-feather of a chief in his fur cap, glanced around keenly as if he had seen or heard something suspicious. He sighted the writing on the tree, moved closer to peer at it, and called for a torch.

Mingan felt Temujin touch his shoulder restrainingly. The boys held their breath while one of the Taidjuts kindled a light leisurely and ignited a torch taken from his saddle. When he had waved it around his head and the flames spluttered up brightly, he handed it to the chief of the Taidjuts.

Still Temujin did not move, and Mingan studied the brown, seamed faces and the evil, glittering eyes that peered around under bronze helmets and sable hats. Suddenly the khan gave a shout of rage, as he grasped the meaning of the writing. At the same instant Temujin stirred, and an arrow sped between the willow stems, thudding into the neck of the chieftain.

The stricken man rose in his stirrups, the torch still gripped in a rigid hand. Twice more Temujin loosed shafts, while Mingan fumbling with cold fingers missed his first shot. His second shaft, better directed, pierced the chest of one of the warriors. Then the torch fell to earth, and the body of the khan slumped down on it, casting the glade into deep shadow.

Two of the Taidjuts were dead and two sorely hurt. Temujin began to creep away on hands and knees. Mingan had stood up, to loose his arrows, and now a shaft whizzed past his ear. He saw the first comer, the Taidjut warrior who had drunk from the spring, advancing toward him, gripping with both hands the hilt of the sword—the weapon that now seemed to Mingan to loom large as the warrior himself.

Tapering to a hand's breadth at the hilt, it widened to the length of a man's forearm at the tip. It rested on the Taidjut's right shoulder, curving down over his back.

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Mingan could see the small, black eyes of his foe fixed on him, and hear the grating of his pointed teeth as he snarled in rage. His two arrows being sped, the boy cast aside his bow and drew his knife, standing his ground.

The skin of his back prickled ominously and his muscles were rigid for action, yet what to do he knew not. The Taidjut leaped forward, letting the ponderous blade slide down behind him, while both fists raised the hilt over his head. Up came the blade and down at Mingan, who leaped aside.

His heels caught in the roots of the underbrush and he fell, while the warrior raised his weapon for a second stroke, grunting in triumph.

Then was heard the whistle of an arrow—a shaft that thudded into the knotted chest of the man as if into a wooden drum. A wheezing of air from pierced lungs, a bubbling of blood in the throat; the Taidjut staggered, yet took another step forward grinning in a ghastly fashion at Mingan.

"Dog—Cathayan!"

A second arrow from the underbrush buried itself in the side of his head and he went down in his tracks. Mingan had not thought that a bow could be as powerful as that of his Mongol ally. He took up the sword of the dead man and looked around. The last of the six Taidjuts had mounted his pony and was riding off toward the horse herd.

Temujin left his cover and jumped on one of the best of the horses moving restlessly beside the spring. Leaning down in the saddle he caught up from the earth a lasso dropped by one of his enemies—a stout bamboo pole to the end of which was attached a cord terminating in a running noose. Wheeling his pony, he started after the fugitive, leaving Mingan breathless, with the great sword in his hand, but not a man on foot to face him.

He watched the two riders disappear into the gathering twilight. Then, half-disbelieving the reality of all that had passed in the last two or three minutes, went to the Taidjut khan, whom he found to be stone dead. So little time had elapsed in the fight that Mingan was able to light a fresh torch from the smoldering one on the ground.

Trailing the sword, he stooped over one of the wounded riders, and found him mortally hurt. Turning to the other who still breathed, he started. In the dim light he had not seen that this was not a Taidjut warrior, but a Cathayan, and, by the feathers in his square cap, an imperial courier.

The man's sight was failing, but he made out the glitter of the yellow robe of the prince, and the peacock feather.

"Lord," he panted, striving to grip the edge of Mingan's dress, "you are of Cathay, not of the Horde. Know that I, an unworthy servant of the planets around the sun, have fulfilled my mission."

"What mission?"

The man peered at Mingan vainly, passed his hand over his eyes.

"I can not see your face, lord of the Dragon brood. But you wear the robe of the Dynasty and bear a warrior's sword— I was sent by him who stands behind the Dragon Seat—Chung-hi—who bade me give order to the Taidjut khan to see that Ye Lui Kutsai Mingan, a young prince of the north, was slain if he came alone to the hunting pavilion. Make it known, honorable sir, to Chung-hi that I——"

He coughed and fell back on his side.

"It shall be known that you delivered the message."

Mingan spoke mechanically, while he wondered if this were the rider that passed him last night. A swift courier, and faithful to Chung-hi. So the prince who stood behind the Dragon Seat was seizing already his heritage—issuing commands that should come only from his father! The aged emperor could not protect the youths of royal blood who came to his court from the outlying provinces. Even the hunt was a scene set for intrigue. Mingan felt as if he stood on a quicksand, not knowing in what direction to take the next step.

His torch died out, and the darkness seemed to close in threefold. Wraiths of gray mist were forming in the hollows—smoke, the Mongols said, that rose up to the surface of the earth from the halls of Erlik, the lord of the lower regions.

In fact the mist veiled the rider that Mingan heard coming toward him from the plain. Not until horse and man were within arm's reach did he recognize Temujin.

The Mongol for once moved slowly. He was dragging at the bamboo pole of the lasso, and at the other end of the rope the body of the sixth Taidjut slid over the grass.

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"Leave the chariot," said Temujin quickly. "It will avail not where we are going."

"Where?" asked Mingan.

"Not far; to the forest line of the highest of these hills. The three Taidjuts guarding the rear fled when they heard the music of weapons. They saw this one die. They will spread the word in our rear that Mongols are raiding. We can not go back through the Taidjut country to the Gobi; we must seek a safe place and spy out where our enemies gather."

"On your right hand, high on the slope of the mountain Pisgah, overlooking the Kinghan Range is the shrine of Kwan-ti, the god of war," Mingan observed. "In the week of the great hunt no one makes the pilgrimage to the place of Kwan-ti. Are you afraid to go there?"

"Why?"

Temujin leaned down to study the face of his comrade. Satisfied, he took the saddles from four of the riderless horses and left them on the ground. Leading up a pony for Mingan to ride, he instructed the Cathayan to go ahead to point out the way, while he gathered up all his arrows and rounded up the scattered ponies—no easy task in the darkness.

"Keep the Cathayan sword: you can not use a bow," he ordered. "Light no more torches to guide our enemies to us. In whose tent have you passed your days that you know no more than that?"

"In the palace of the emperor," said Mingan frankly. "My name is Ye Lui Kutsai Mingan."

"Ming-an, the Bright One." Temujin grunted. "You can not drive horses; can you ride one?"

"Yes," declared the prince.

As a matter of fact he had not sat in a saddle since childhood, but he would have been ashamed to admit that to Temujin.

UNDER the tall firs of the higher slope of Pisgah the fane of Kwan-ti overlooked the brown plain of the Gobi, behind the green hill country that formed the heart of the Taidjut lands. As Mingan said, the shrine was deserted, for no one would have presumed to enter the lines of the beaters that drove game from the plain and the ravines, to be killed by the courtiers.

It was a clear day, and the two boys sat comfortably on the stone steps leading up to the pagoda, watching the panorama of the hunt. So vast was its extent that they could observe only the lines of riders out toward the plain and the cavalcades of bright-robed Cathayans who, with their slaves, rode out to the rendezvous of the kill each day. Temujin's ponies grazed and rested in the open glades of the forest, and Temujin himself shot down quail and hares for the pot, and kindled the cooking fire in among the trees after darkness when the smoke would not disclose their presence. He never asked Mingan's help, although he always shared what food they had fairly.

"How long will your emperor hunt?" he asked.

"For three days more." Mingan thought this would impress his companion. "Each day they will kill twenty stags, thrice as many boar, and hundreds of antelopes."

Temujin looked up impassively.

"When the *orkhons* of the Horde hunt in the Gobi, they slay each day a thousand deer, and load a hundred camels with the skins. When the hunt is ended the prairie can not be seen for the wolves that gather about, nor the sun in the sky for the vultures that flock to our trail."

This was hard for the Cathayan to believe. He had seen the gray wolves of the northern forests harry villages in Liao-tung unhindered. He had heard that the Mongols of the Three Rivers live by hunting and raiding—by eating the horses of their herds and wearing the skins of animals, and he thought that must be a miserable existence.

"Some of the Horde," went on the chief's son, "ride deer—reindeer, and wear their hoofs for heels on their boots. They are the Tungusi who dwell in the frozen prairies of the north. They have red hair and are good fighters."

Now Mingan smiled, believing that Temujin jested, but the Mongol was occupied with his own thoughts.

"Could a horse jump your Great Wall?" he asked abruptly.

"Can a horse jump five times the height of a man?"

"When I am Khan of the Horde I will send my warriors to break through it."

Looking at the restless boy whose ragged sheepskin barely covered his brown limbs, Mingan did not take his words seriously. Later, he had cause to remember the boast of the chief's son.

"You have no siege engines," he pointed

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out, "and we have many stone, and arrow-throwers on the Wall. Besides, you have not men enough."

"*Kai*—it is true. The tribes fight among themselves, and turn not upon their enemies." Temujin nodded, rubbing his iron sleevelets thoughtfully. "The Cathayans slew my grandsire's sire foully. It is also true that the strength of a wall is not in the stones that built it."

"In what, then?" Mingan was a little proud of his learning, and was not minded to be corrected by a herd boy—as he considered Temujin to be.

"In the men on top of it. If they are weak, the wall is useless, though high as a hundred spears." He pointed down at the plain. "Look—who is that khan, riding on the shoulders of his men?"

Temujin had the eyes of a hawk. Only after along peering did the prince make out a yellow speck among other dots moving out toward the beaters.

"It must be Chung-hi, who some day will be emperor. He is sitting on the hunting platform, carried by slaves, so that no beast can harm him when he casts his spear."

The Mongul grunted.

"The jackal! He kills when others drive in his game—" He yawned and lay back. "I could take a wall that Chung-hi defended."

"How?" Mingan was interested, for the heir-apparent was Keeper of the Great Wall.

"By making the jackal afraid. Then he would run away. That is a jackal's nature."

Now, because it troubled him and because he fancied that after a day or so he would see no more of the chief's son, Mingan told Temujin of the plot against him, the deaths of his cousins, and the peril that stood in wait for him if he should return to the court. The memory of the overthrow of the Taidjuts in the ravine was strong upon him, and perhaps he wished to show the Mongol that he, also, was not without enemies.

But Temujin, watching the Cathayans on the plain, seemed not to heed his words. As a matter of fact he listened carefully, as Mingan discovered on the morrow.

"I could escape from you, O Temujin," he pointed out, annoyed by the other's silence, "and disclose your hiding-place to the emperor, thus winning his favor."

"You are free to go."

Two things restrained Mingan. After all, the Mongol had saved his life, and there was truce between the Horde and Cathay. Besides, he had a suspicion that if he led a party to the shrine of Kwan-ti, the boy and his herd would not be found there, for Temujin would take a chance with his enemies on the plain rather than be cornered by the Cathayans.

Temujin observed him, and looked away, satisfied. If Mingan meant to betray him, the prince would not have spoken his mind.

"You are a *usenin*—a teller of tales. Is that how you pass the time when you are shut up in the houses of Yen-king?" *

To the Mongol it seemed strange that the Cathayans chose to dwell under a roof. Mingan, falling in with his mood, told of the tens of thousands of mailed warriors that drilled under the generals' eyes in the fields within the walls of the city—walls that a rider on a swift horse could not circle between sunrise and sunset, and of the myriad junks that came up the river from Zipangu, the island of savages, and other places of the sea.

"It is time for me to go forth with my bow," Temujin observed, "and seek out meat for our eating. Will you watch the horses?"

This was the first time he had asked Mingan to do anything for him, and the prince was surprized. He waited a long time after the other had disappeared into the forest, but Temujin did not return. The sun went down—a red ball that sank into the golden prairie out of the purple vault of the sky. A whippoorwill began its evening plaint, and somewhere behind the bulwark of the mountains the moon rose. Mingan could make out the dark blur of the ponies that clustered together with the coming of night.

He felt the chill touch of damp air and turned toward the pagoda of Kwan-ti, god of war, drawing in his breath sharply upon beholding the dark form of the god outlined against the pallid sky in the east—for the temple was no more than a roof, set upon bamboo pillars.

"What shall I do?" he thought. "Harm may have befallen Temujin. If I am absent from the hunting pavilion another night, they will search for me, and when I return the emperor will look at me with a darkened face. O Kwan-ti, to whom all

*The Great Court, Peking.

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things are known, send me a sign to show the path that I must follow!"

No sooner had he said that than he was frightened. Here were no priests to frighten away the evil spirits that dwelt on the mountain summit, and the deserted shrine seemed to be peopled with shadowy forms. If he had not promised his companion to watch the horses, Mingan would have fled——

The whippoorwill ceased its song abruptly, and the boy sprang up, grasping his heavy sword. From the edge of the forest a rider was moving toward him soundlessly. Mingan knew that no Cathayan noble would seek the shrine of Kwan-ti without attendants with lights and cymbals to drive away the mountain devils, and no one but a noble would possess a horse.

The newcomer halted at the foot of the steps, almost within reach of the boy, who, feeling the hot breath of the horse's nostrils, knew that it was no apparition but a living being.

He lifted the long blade, and the rider moved.

"Stand and stir not. I have an arrow fitted to bow, and if you bring down your big sword I will loose my shaft."

The words were Mongol, and Mingan, straining his eyes, could make out in the treacherous light what seemed to be a child, muffled in a fur cloak, a child with tresses of dark hair bound by a silver fillet. Surely the voice was a girl's.

"Do you understand, Cathayan? Where is Temujin?"

Mingan lowered his sword.

"I do not know."

"*Ahai!* Does the kite not know where the dead hare lies? Here are his ponies—I have felt of the *tanga*, the brand on their flanks. Have you slain him, Cathayan, for a sacrifice to your god?"

Mingan explained that the chief's son had gone in search of game and had not returned. By now he could see the delicate features and dark eyes of the girl, and the arrow that she still held on her bow.

"What man are you? What are you doing here?" Her voice, soft, with a quick lisp that Mingan found hard to understand, made the harsh gutturals musical.

He told her, not without some pride, his name and how he had met with Temujin; and she was not satisfied until she had heard the story of the fight in the ravine. Then she laughed, under her breath.

"*Kai*—it is true. You are the fool."

"How?"

"So your Cathayan warriors said—they who are camped in the ravine of the Taidjut road. They said that you were witless and blind with pride in your new finery."

She stopped to gaze, wide-eyed, at the yellow robe and the peacock feather, then continued: "*Kai*—it is true that you are like a wood-pheasant, fair to look at. But the talk at the Cathayan fire was that your enemies would put out your life like a candle in the wind."

"How did you understand our speech? Are you a Mongol?"

"Nay, I know many things. The night speaks to me, and the raven sits on the ridge-pole of my tent——"

"Daughter of Podu, the gypsy—" Temujin's deep voice came from beside them although neither had heard him approach—"you have the tongue of the cat-bird that is never still. Peace!"

The girl unstrung her bow and perched sidewise in her saddle with a little sigh of relief.

"Son of Yesukai, have you become a Cathayan house dog, to think only of food, while the wolves gather around you, sitting on their haunches——"

"Peace, I said." The gypsy fell silent. "Little Burta, has the smoke of Podu's tent fire died away, that you seek me in such a spot?"

At this the corners of her small mouth drooped and she lowered her eyes.

"Nay, Temujin, it is your tent fire that grows cold. Yesukai, your father, is dying, and asks for you."

The Mongol threw down the brace of quail he was carrying and his eyes went out over the moonlit plain.

"He has been poisoned," she went on. "The Taidjuts who came to his *yurt* as guests put poison in his drinking-cup. May they be torn by the dogs of Erlik! Because you had passed our camp, when you pursued them, the Mongols who went in search of you took me with them to point out your trail. When we came to the lines of the Cathayan hunters, they could approach no nearer, but I went among the Taidjut fires at night and heard of the death of their khan at your hand in the ravine. I was glad, and from the place of the slaying I followed your trail to this mountain, and at sunset saw the horses."

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"The slayers of Yesukai have already gone to give greeting to Erlik," the Mongol said slowly.

Burta's teeth flashed in a smile, then she glanced at Mingan coldly.

"Why do you suffer him near you?"

Temujin, sunk in thought, seemed not to heed her. But Mingan started, remembering the words of Chung-hi spoken several days ago at the Western Gate:

"By giving gold to the Taidjuts—nothing failed and no one suspects—will not trouble your hours of pleasure."

The party of the horse-thieves had returned from the Mongol prairie to the road to the hunting pavilion: Chung-hi had sent a messenger to them. Surely the Taidjut khan had been acting under orders from the Warden of the Western Marches.

And this messenger had given the Taidjuts the command to slay him—Mingan—if they found him alone.

"Mingan—" the chief's son roused himself—"is my comrade. Do him no mischief!"

The gypsy child pouted and, from the corners of her eyes, peered at the tall prince with distrust, even with jealousy. Leaning toward the Mongol she whispered anxiously, until Temujin silenced her by taking the two heavy braids of hair, crossing them over her lips and knotting them forcibly behind her head. Mingan gathered from her gestures that she wanted Temujin to kill him, strip him of his clothes and use them as a disguise in penetrating the Cathayan lines.

"We must mount and ride swiftly to the country of the Three Rivers of my father, Yesukai," Temujin declared. "You must come to clear the way for us if we fall in with a strong band of your Cathayan hunters."

At this Mingan would have protested, when he thought of the plot of Chung-hi against the boy's father. If Temujin should be caught by the soldiers of the warden, he would be tortured, if not killed; if the Taidjuts captured him, his fate would be no better. As for Burta——

A proverb of the Master K'ung * occurred to him—

"A man who slays an enemy with his own hand is better than one who stirs up others to kill."

"I will go," he agreed thoughtfully, "as far as the last cordon of my people."

*Confucius.

But Temujin had left him and was already rounding up the ponies, assisted by Burta.

IT SEEMED to the prince that it would be fatal to attempt to take the horses with them through the encampments of the Taidjuts.

Temujin, however, would not think of leaving them behind. That evening he had descended the mountain slope to scout around the nearest fires of his foes—this had delayed his return—and had discovered a trail leading down among the gullies on the left flank of the hunter's lines. Mounting a big, roan stallion, the leader of the herd, he led the way thither, followed by the other ponies, with Burta and Mingan bringing up the rear.

The night was young enough for them to make out the ruddy glow of the fires, where men had settled down for the night, and to avoid them. And the clear moonlight enabled Temujin to pick out the trail easily.

Without being challenged they descended the forested slope of the mountain, wound among the gullies of the foot-hills, and felt themselves in the warmer air of the wide plain. Heading from copse to thicket, and keeping clear of the sky-line on the ridges, the Mongol finally left the last of the cover and struck out into the sweep of high grass, going slowly to make it seem as if he were leading the ponies from one camp to another.

Often he stopped, taking warning from sights or sounds unperceived by Mingan. They came presently upon a stream, lined with gnarled willows through which the moonlight filtered sparingly, and here Temujin led the ponies down to water, and to let them breathe.

Mingan presently heard him grunt warningly at Burta and stride up the bank to look out. Voices approached, and Mingan stepped back into the deep shadow of the trees.

Four riders descended the bank and, halting to let their horses drink, noticed the other ponies.

"What herd is this?" one called out in the western dialect of Cathay. Mingan could see that it was one of the palladins of the court, a stout warrior encased in a mass of quilted armor, a ten-foot spear hanging at his back.

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"Mine, if it please you, uncle," responded Burta, advancing to his stirrup.

"And whose are you?" ejaculated the warrior, somewhat vaguely, being a little the worse for wine at the festival. "A star-eyed, lissom maid, by all the *rakchas* of the air!

"A pavilion of trees,
And a goblet of wine.
Alas, what are these,
No companion is mine!"

He stooped to kiss the face of the girl, but she bent her head under pretense of stroking the silver-inlaid breast-strap of the charger. Recovering his balance with some difficulty, the hero seemed inclined to continue his song, when one of the men-at-arms pointed out the figure of Temujin, advancing toward them in the gloom under the trees.

"You have your shadow, O Commander of a Thousand! Is not that companion enough?"

The mirthful rider bent his head cautiously, stared at his image in the pool and smiled. Whereat the others urged their horses on, and the charger splashed across the stream after them, bearing with it the palladin whose thoughts seemed to have turned from women to wine, for the last heard of him was the announcement in a hearty voice:

"The moon can not swallow
Her share of the grog,
And my shadow must follow
Wherever I jog!"

Mingan drew a long breath of relief, for he had expected that any second the Mongol's arrows might begin to fly through the air, and Burta was silent as they changed their saddles to fresh beasts and started forward again.

CRE-AK—cree-eek: the leather of Mingan's saddle squeaked louder and louder. *Slap—flap, slap,* went the breast-strap and reins. He started out of a doze, aware that he was shivering in the early morning chill, and that his legs ached.

The herd had struck up a smart pace and was passing over a stretch of rolling country, dotted with thickets. The rising sun warmed his back, and he felt refreshed.

"Are we out of the cordons?" he asked Burta, seeing no sign of other riders.

The girl made a face at him and shook her head. Temujin, too, was uneasy. Mingan sighed, for he would have liked to halt and rest—though not to sit down, as yet. His glance was caught by several antelope, breaking from cover before them. A fox appeared out of a clump of sage, and turned in its tracks at sight of them, vanishing before it was fairly seen.

Then Mingan was aware of a clamor behind them, a medley of cymbals, drums and hand-gongs, and knew that the beaters of the royal hunt had started forth to the plain, evidently driving west.

Temujin turned his horse's head more to the left, and quickened his pace. For some time they made rapid progress, leaving behind them the tumult of the beaters. Then, topping a rise, they saw along all the left flank a long line of Tadijuts bearing in toward them.

Reining in sharply, Temujin scanned the line in vain for a break, and then started forward to the right, away from the riders. Now the ponies bunched close together, heads up, snorting with sudden fear. Here and there more deer came into view, racing away from the Taidjuts, and a leopard turned up almost under the horses' noses, streaking away like a shaft loosed from a cross-bow.

A fine wapiti stamped up to the summit of a knoll, and wheeled about, laying its antlers low on its back. The sight and smell of the plains animals made the ponies frantic, and Mingan had all he could do for a while to manage his horse. He thought that they must surely out-distance the hunt, at such a pace. But Temujin pointed out that many of the animals appeared from in front, running toward them. They swept down into a long, grassy gully, among groups of darting antelope, and, rounding a bend in the declivity, came full into a confusion of beasts.

Across the ravine in front of them a squadron of mailed cavalry was deployed, shouting and waving mantles at the game.

The headlong rush of the ponies carried the three fugitives up to within arrow-shot of the Cathayan horsemen before Temujin worked his horse out of the press and halted, his bow strung and an arrow on the string. Burta forced her pony to his side. The Cathayans promptly took up javelins and bows and slowly drew nearer.

Mingan, seeing that they were nearly

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hemmed in, called to his companions in Mongol not to resist, and searched for the leader of the mailed archers. At sight of the young prince in court dress the captain in command dismounted and came forward to hold Mingan's rein and hear what he had to say.

"Leader of a Hundred," the boy ordered clearly, "I am Ye Lui Kutsai Mingan, and I have rank in your country, Liao-tung. For the first time since coming of age I see the warriors of Liao-tung—" with pride his glance went around the circle of watching men—"when, by command of the Son of Heaven, I am to ride before all others of the hunt. With these two barbarians I would pass your line, taking with me their ponies."

He indicated the emblem of the Northern banners on his shoulder, in which command the mounted archers were included.

The captain bowed several times, then made pretense of adjusting a buckle on the pony's halter. Mingan noticed that his fingers trembled.

"Your servant is honored by your discerning order. O son of illustrious fathers, when you have passed beyond the sight of the Cathayans, heed these words. Evil awaits you in the Dragon Court. Do not return, but ride with your companions to your people of Liao-tung who impatiently desire sight of their prince. Favored of the stars, has your servant leave to withdraw?"

Mingan nodded, shaking his sleeve slightly. The Cathayans drew off, staring awhile at Temujin and Burta, then set about the business of the hunt. Beyond their ranks the nearest Taidjuts were coming into view and Mingan and Temujin lost no time in trotting out of sight down the ravine.

When they came to the open prairie again, Mingan reined in.

"Here you are safe, son of Yesukai. You are in the land of the Horde. Now will I say farewell and go to the emperor."

Temujin brought his pony up and stretched out his right hand, clasping both the prince's wrists between his fingers with a sudden motion.

For a moment Mingan strained to free himself, and realized that the grip of the stronger boy could not be broken. Temujin, still holding Mingan helpless, dismounted, drew with his free hand the Cathayan's long girdle from his waist and bound his wrists; then, taking a rope from his own saddle, tied the boy's feet together under the horse's belly.

"Fool," he grunted, looking up quizzically. "Would turn back into a snare set for your feet? Have you forgotten the ill-will of the son of the emperor? Burta whispered to me the words of the commander of the archers. Would you escape to Liao-tung?"

Mingan shook his head. It would be useless—he would be sent for, and, failing to appear, would be proclaimed a rebel at the court of Yen-king, and the tablets of his fathers would be taken down and broken—which was not to be thought of.

"Then," said Temujin gravely, "you will be my friend, and my *usenin*—teller of tales. Come, we will take the trail that leads to the desert."

MEANWHILE the feast of Hao was nearly at an end, and the aged emperor of Cathay declared he had seen enough of hunting and summoned his councilors and astrologers to hear the evidence of the disappearance of the prince of Liao-tung, and to decide what had become of him.

The Taidjuts who had escaped from the fight in the ravine gave their testimony, and, to justify their flight, stated emphatically that a hundred hobgoblins of the steppe, armed with thunderbolts, had attacked them and had slain their chief after writing the mysterious prophecy on the tree-trunk.

They had not seen Mingan, and they said that if Temujin had been in the ravine, he must have been in league with the spirits of the waste-places, because the chief's son could not write, and there was the inscription on the tree for all to see.

Cathayan priests who had gone to offer belated sacrifices at the shrine of Kwan-ti reported hoof-marks all about the pagoda, and heaps of ashes where spirit fires had been kindled—surely supernatural, because they had been seen by no man.

Mingan's abandoned hunting-chariot and horses were shown to the emperor, and those who found it reported that there were no boot tracks visible around it in the moist earth by the stream—only the prints of bare feet, which surely could not belong to the prince.

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Lastly rumors came from the Liao-tung banner-men that Mingan had been seen riding in company with a hobgoblin and a woman like no other in Cathay, beautiful beyond words, and clad in ermine skins.

This jogged the memory—a trifle wine-tinted—of a certain fat under-officer, who proclaimed loudly that he had spoken to the woman herder of the horses and without doubt she was a *rakcha*, a female vampire, who had tried to fasten herself on him.

So it was decided that Mingan had been carried off by devils.

Perhaps he had been turned into a horse or wolf by the woman-spirit of the steppe; perhaps he wandered through the wastes of the Gobi in human form, but a devil incarnate. In any event, if he reappeared in Cathay, he was to be bound and turned over to the priests.

The old emperor sighed and said in a solemn voice:

"The spirits of the steppe are very powerful and this place is ill-omened. Let us return to the wall, and to our palace at Taitung where our actors will devise a new play portraying the virtues of the Cathayans and the evils of the demons of the sandy steppes. Let gongs be beaten, and paper-prayers burned; let paper also be scattered across the path behind us, so that any devils who follow will be led astray. I grieve for the evil fate of Mingan, who was my second son."

Thereafter no men of Cathay ventured in the ravine where the dead bodies lay under the tree, and the Taidjuts made a new road around the place. Only Chung-hi, struggling against his deep superstition, passed that way to make sure that his messenger and his hired slayers, the Taidjuts, were beyond all doubt powerless to reveal his plot.

He was well content: those who could have betrayed him were dead, Mingan was powerless, even though living, and the prestige of Chung-hi was greater than ever. Only one thing troubled him.

In the heavens Mingan's birth star glowed in a favorable constellation, and the northern warriors whispered among themselves that the time would come when the Prince of Liao-tung would return to dwell among them again, and take his place as leader. Chung-hi shifted uneasily when he thought of it.

III

THE MASTER OF THE HORDE

FOR several days Temujin and his two companions passed swiftly over wide prairies where the dry grass rose high as the horse's noses.

Here were no villages, but only clusters of gray, Tatar tents visible at times on the horizon, and scattered herds of ponies and cattle. Temujin avoided these and pressed on without halting, except to rest the horses. He and Burta slept in the saddle, and Mingan from very weariness learned to do likewise.

The son of Yesukai touched no food for four days, and Mingan would have fared badly if the Mongol boy had not ordered Burta to share her dried mutton and raisins —with which her saddle-bags were filled— with him. This, seeing that the prisoner was suffering, she did willingly enough, and even prevailed on Temujin to take off his bonds on the morning of the second day.

Mingan was too tired to think of trying to escape from the Mongol that night— even if he could have stolen away from the keen eyes of the children of the plains.

The third day, Mingan judged that they covered four hundred *li** by the late afternoon. Temujin's will to go on would suffer no hindrance, his eyes were smoldering, as if he were faced by a visible foeman. It was a hard race, that ride over the plateau of the northern Gobi; to Mingan it was torment. But Temujin was racing against time, and the hand of death.

"Look toward the sun," said Burta to Mingan.

The chief's son already had seen what she noticed—a long line of dust ahead of them. They were on a small knoll in the prairie, and the wind from the west whipped at the girl's dark tresses, and dried the sweat on Temujin's hollow cheeks. Mingan watched the dust draw nearer, revealing dark specks that proved to be horsemen, riding along a front of a half-mile.

As the gap between the strangers and Temujin closed, Mingan saw that there were other lines, evenly spaced, behind the first—several thousand riders in all. In the center of the moving square above the film of dust that rose from the dry soil

*About a hundred and forty miles. To-day a Chinese *li* may be anything from a tenth of a mile, to a mile, as travelers soon learn.

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appeared a long pole, topped by the antlers of a wapiti—a rude enough standard.

"Tatars," said Burta briefly.

They rode not close together with the slow pace of the chargers of the mailed Cathayan cavalry but in squadrons of a hundred, each with its leader in front. They were thick-set men, brown of skin and clad in black, rawhide armor, coated with dust, and Mingan looked in vain for supply train or pack-animals. The Tatars had goatskin saddle-bags tied to the peaks of the high saddles, and two bows slung at their shoulders, with a sword or ax in their belts. And every warrior had a spare pony.

As if the three wanderers on the knoll had been an islet and the riders a succession of swells, the Tatars dashed up and divided to pass them. Mingan caught glimpses of scarred faces, and occasionally steel ring mail gleaming under flying fur cloaks.

"*Hai, aho-ho! Koke Mong-kŭ, hail* (Ho brothers, warrior Mongols, ho!)"

The lines took up the shout as they came abreast, and echoed the war-cry of the Horde. Mingan stared at them, aware of power in the steady gait of the ordered ranks, in the deep voices of the riders. It was his first glimpse of the fighting men of the Horde that was made up of Tatars, Mongols, Merkets, and even the strong Keraits of the west, the desert tribes of the south and the reindeer folk of the white regions in the north—but of which the Khan of the Mongols had always been the leader.

As the standard passed close to them a burly rider, hatless and white-haired, galloped up, and reined in sharply by Temujin.

"Are you hale and well?" asked the boy quietly, raising his hand in greeting. "O Mukuli, Khan of the Tatars, are your cattle fat, and your herds numerous? Have your sheep fat tails, and is the grazing good in your land?"

"Hale and well," growled the old chieftain, responding to the customary salutation, while his black eyes scanned the three keenly, thereafter shifting to the mist on the horizon through which the sun flamed dully. "Why are you in my land, far from the Three Rivers?"

"I have slain the Taidjut khan who put poison in Yesukai's cup."

Mukuli considered this, with approval.

"Good! A snake has been trodden down." He pulled at his mustache thoughtfully. "It is well that you did this. You are a slender arrow, but you are Khan of the Mongols and Master of the Horde. Yesukai died last night. The women are wailing in the death tent."

The corners of Temujin's lips drew down, and his shoulders stiffened. Beyond this he displayed no emotion. Mukuli, squinting at the setting sun, fingered his reins.

"Do not stop to pull thorns from your feet, or stones from the hoofs of your ponies. Go swiftly to your *ordu*, your encampment."

When Temujin made no response the Tatar explained that the *orkhons*, the chieftains, who had assembled at Yesukai's side on learning of his illness, were talking now of dispersing to their various tribes. They had acknowledged the leadership of Temujin's father, not without some discontent—for Yesukai had been more of a leader in the field than a chief of a confederacy.

Now that the mastery of the Horde had fallen to Temujin, most of the khans declared that they would not be ruled by a boy.

"What said you, Mukuli?"

"When Yesukai sat on the white mare's skin at the head of the *kurultai*, the council, I was his sworn brother, as was Wang Khan, master of the Keraits."

"He who is called by some Prester John of Asia," nodded Temujin. "And now?"

"Can a nursling carry the yak-tail standard?" asked the Tatar dryly. "Nay, it is heavy. It was for this talk that I left the *kurultai*, to seek you, hearing that you had crossed the Tatar grazing-lands to follow the path of vengeance into Cathay. It is one thing to slay a thieving Taidjut; it is another to lead a million warriors."

"What is your mind?" observed the boy again, quietly.

"True, the Tatars are knitted to Mongols as flesh is to bone. As a friend, the tents of my people are open to you—we will give horses and food without stint. But if you seek to be verily Master of the Horde, and my overlord, then first you must prove your worth, as good metal is tested. Then will I place my standard behind yours. That is my word, and by the white horse Kotwan I will not unsay it."

"Am I a dog, to come to your heel?"

Temujin's lips drew back a little from his teeth.

Mukuli nodded, as if he had expected such an answer, and watched with interest the sun disappear behind a pall of gray.

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"Yesukai, who was my comrade, gave me a message for your hearing. 'Go,' he said, 'to Wang Khan, in the south and west of the Horde, who holds the castle above the sands. He is the king called Prester John and he will aid you, being wise in all things, and my friend.'"

Temujin shook his head.

"Was Prester John at the council?"

"Nay, for he goes not beyond the walls of his castle, wherein you must seek him." Mukuli gathered up his reins. "The wild-goose, Temujin, takes flight in the face of the storm, but the snow-pigeon seeks safety in the earth, when the Winter is hard, among its kind. Turn not aside from Prester John, who is shrewder even than Jamuka, our Master of Plotting. You and he and I could conquer the world."

"I have heard your word. May the rain make your pastures green; may the way be open before you."

He lifted his hand to his head and dropped it to his lips, in farewell. Mukuli, ill-pleased at this sign of authority, glanced at him briefly, hesitated as if he would urge him further to make the alliance he suggested and then wheeled his horse away.

"May you come in peace to the end of your journey," he growled over his shoulder.

The standard-bearer and the group of officers who had awaited him at a little distance, put their horses in motion. The last line of the horsemen, that had halted behind their khan, swept past, with a shout.

"Hai, aho-ho. Koke Mong-ku ho!"

A drumming of hoofs on the baked earth, a taste of dust in the air, and the array of the Tatars left them.

MINGAN had thought of the Gobi as a waste of sand. In the last day's ride they galloped over a level sward, sparkling with daisies, where the rarefied air was like wine. They crossed a river near a range of blue mountains, and in the early afternoon came to the *ordu* of the dead Yesukai—a city of tents in a shallow valley, where large herds of horses were grazing under guard of boys little younger than Temujin.

At the crest of the valley Burta dismounted and picked out her pony from the small group that had survived the journey.

"It is better that I should depart to Podu's lands," she said to the Mongol. "My father would be angry, if he has been drinking *kumiss* and sees me come to the *kurultai* at your side. Are you—" she lowered her eyes—"pleased with me, or angry?"

Temujin had been silent all day, and now he frowned.

"*Kai*, so you fear to be seen at my side!"

Burta flushed and tossed her head, the silver earrings jingling.

"I go where I will and now, because I am weary, seek the path to my home."

As Temujin watched her without comment, her flush deepened.

"Because you are Master of the Horde you can not summon or dismiss me at pleasure. You can be angry, if you like—it is all one to me!"

The boy suddenly drew his horse close to her and placed his hand under her chin so that he could see into her eyes.

"Little Burta, I am pleased with you."

"Verily! The king is kind!"

She tried to free herself, and, failing, fell to whimpering. Temujin released her.

"I will come to your father's tents before another Summer has passed."

Burta glanced at him fleetingly, and turned away. Yet Mingan noticed that she rode slowly, and presently she called over her shoulder softly—

"I will pray that the spirit of Yesukai finds peace in the sky world."

Nearing the tent village, Temujin waited until the girl was lost to sight and then turned his ponies loose into a herd belonging to the Mongols. Mingan noticed that his hands trembled a little and the pulse in his brown throat beat furiously as they rode in among the tents, prepared to face the council that sat by the death tent of Yesukai.

Word of their coming had preceded them, for men lined the path they took—squat warriors, bow-legged but massive of shoulder, with the skin of their faces wrinkled like dried grapes. They wore high boots and walked with the short, clumsy step of those more at home in the saddle than on foot. They were armed with bows, javelins and short, iron maces. As Temujin passed, paying no attention to them, they grunted in pleasure and tried to touch his horse or stirrup. These, Mingan learned later, were the warriors of Yesukai's clan, the backbone of the Mongols.

But as the young chief neared the largest tent, a cavalcade of riders hemmed in by

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the assembled throngs, barred his way.

The leader of the horsemen, an old desert man brilliantly clad in a crimson Turkish *khalat* and a purple, plush cap, seemed ill at ease at seeing the boys.

"Greetings, Podu," observed Temujin. "Has the fire of the council died out, and is the cask of liquor empty that you mount to leave the *ordu* before the new khan comes to take his seat?"

Podu's fine brown eyes were moist with the warmth of wine, and his white teeth bared in a smile.

"Nay, Temujin, I have paid honor to the dead hero Yesukai, your sire. I have left a fine white horse to be slain on his grave, so that he can ride fittingly in his journey through the sky-world to the banquet hall of the dead palladins. As for the *kurultai*—" he fingered his gold ear-rings slyly—"that is quite broken up, quite."

"How, Khan of the Gipsies?" Temujin's eyes narrowed.

"Why, like a raven's nest when the black sand-storm sweeps it away. *Kai*, it is so! Mukuli has turned his back, and the khan of the spear-bearing Merkets, and the chief of the reindeeer folk have ridden off on their horned beasts. They bayed like dogs—" old Podu swayed in his saddle and his words were twisted—"and slunk off like foxes. May their heads be cut off and salted down——"

"But the ten Mongol khans abide my coming?"

Podu shook his head mysteriously.

"The half of them have gone back to their clans saying that they will not follow in battle a nursling yet smeared with milk."

The veins in the boy's forehead stood out, and the muscles of his arms tightened. Podu started and, eying the motionless throng of warriors, sobered visibly.

"Nay, Temujin. It is only that your khans grumble like camels when the load is bound on. I would not leave your side, but I must assemble my trade caravans before the Autumn storms."

Temujin's fingers caught at the arrows in the quiver at his saddle peak, and his men surged forward, waiting for his word. But his glance went to the valley's side where Burta had said farewell, and he sat silent a moment, thinking.

"Pass, Podu, and seek your tents. Yet give up to me the gold tablet that marks you for an *orkhon*, a palladin of Yesukai. When you have left this camp you will be no longer a khan of the Horde."

Slowly Podu obeyed, his eyes watchful. With a sigh he handed over a small square of gold, inscribed with writing, hefting it reluctantly as he did so. Temujin put it into his girdle and waited until the nomads had ridden off before he sought the council tent, and dismounted.

A tall chieftain, clad in rich nankeen, with a sapphire-studded scabbard and a sable hat, came out of the tent and held his horse, smiling a welcome.

"Successful as always, you return O Temujin, my khan," he said. "This time with a Cathayan captive."

Temujin greeted the newcomer by name, Jamuka. This was the Khan of the Jelairs, of Turkish descent, called in the Horde the Master of Plotting. By his proud bearing and quick, intelligent eyes Mingan judged him to be wiser than the Mongols—a judgment that afterward proved most true. He saw, too, that Temujin was pleased to see his cousin.

The more so, because, drawing back the entrance flap of the council tent, the young Khan beheld no more than five elderly Mongols awaiting him—some sleeping and some the worse for wine. In truth the leaders of the Horde had forsaken him.

He let fall the flap and put his hand on Jamuka's shoulder, his eyes blazing from his gaunt face.

"O my cousin, the *orkhons* have scattered to the far corners of the earth, and you alone, save these five, stand to await me. I will not seek them."

He raised his hand toward the high standard before the tent—a pole bearing a yak's horns and cross-piece from which hung the long, yak's tails. "I will find new palladins to take the seats of the old. This is my word and it will not change."

Jamuka shook his head reflectively.

"Where will you seek for new heroes? You are lean with hunger, and consumed by the fires of anger." His glance shifted to Mingan. "It is well you have brought this Cathayan, to be slain at Yesukai's grave."

Temujin's eyes narrowed.

"I have gone among the riders who went to the edge of the emperor's hunt to seek you," went on Jamuka gravely, "and I have learned what they heard whispered among the followers of the Dragon around the fires at night. The Taidjuts who slew

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Yesukai had gold upon them, and it was coin of Cathay. Two of them escaped your arrows and went back to rob the bodies of their comrades; having great wealth, their tongues wagged.

"This thing is true."

A murmur of assent came from Jamuka's retinue of nobles, and an answering growl from the Mongol warriors massed around them. Those who could not see Mingan pressed forward upon their fellows; those who stood nearest laid hands upon weapons.

The prince folded his arms and looked at them calmly; he had been schooled to keep from betraying emotion, nor did he lack dignity. Those who saw him, so, did not realize that cold shivers were chasing up and down his back, or that utter fatigue gripped mind and body.

He, too, knew that Jamuka spoke the truth.

"Yesukai," Chung-hi had whispered to the emperor within Mingan's hearing, "will not trouble your hours of pleasure."

From the death tent near at hand sounded the subdued beating of a drum, mingled with the shrill lament of women.

Chung-hi, Mingan reflected, could not have planned more shrewdly, if he had schemed for the prince of Liao-tung to be slain beside Yesukai. Temujin, grieving for his father, and sorrowing over the loss of his heroes, could hardly fail to give him up to the throngs that thirsted for his death. For one thing, the young khan could not afford to deny the wishes of his men.

"Why do you hesitate, Temujin?" questioned the Jelair chief carelessly. "Let your followers take life from the Cathayan."

"Aye," said another. "Surely this thing must be!"

"Kabul also died of poison from the Dragon's claw."

"Twenty pieces of gold, it was——

"We will throw this youth's head over the wall——"

"Nay, Temujin will make of it a silver drinking-cup."

All the whispers that reached Mingan's ears were hostile. Only one voice was lifted in his favor:

"He bears himself well; he is no black-boned knave," a Mongol warrior said judiciously.

All at once Temujin flung up his head.

"Peace, dogs! I am the khan. No man speaks before me."

At this Jamuka, who was the boy's elder by ten years or more, started angrily, and would have spoken, but Temujin was before him.

"Abide in this place, Jamuka. I go to the tent of Yesukai. When I come forth the lot of this Cathayan will be decided."

He instructed several Mongols to take Mingan to his own tent and to keep him there until other orders were issued.

Mingan was led out of the gathering to the leather *yurt* of the khan, which his guards did not enter, contenting themselves with squatting in the entrance where they could watch him. He sat down on a pile of leopard skins, paying no attention to them. Presently others came with a bowl of fermented milk thickened with rice, and cheese, and offered it to him.

His hunger was acute and, finishing off the food, he asked for more. The men glanced at each other in surprize at being addressed in the Mongol tongue, and when Mingan had emptied a second bowl, one—the officer who had commented on his bearing heretofore—muttered that he ate like a noble.

The truth was that Mingan's exhaustion was so great that the peril of death was no more than a new, numbing pain.

After a while Temujin appeared and sat down by him.

"I have said to my men that you are my comrade. Speak openly, and tell me what you know of the death of my father."

Mingan hesitated but, aware that the Mongols already knew the truth, explained that it had been a plot of one of the favorites of the court, and that the emperor had had no hand in it.

"Chung-hi!" said Temujin.

Mingan remaining silent, the young khan went on to say he had thought, from his talk with Mingan at the shrine of Kwan-ti, that the prince of Liao-tung had not been concerned in the plot against Yesukai. Under the circumstances, he said, he—Temujin—would be a dog and the son of a dog if he let Mingan die.

"You must pass between the fires, O my first friend," he concluded. "That is our test of all strangers. If you are brave you will not be harmed, if you are a coward, you will be burnt by the fire and we will break your limbs and throw you to the dogs."

Mingan could smile a little, thinking that

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it made little difference if a man were innocent or not, so long as he was bold enough to satisfy the Mongols.

"Heed what I say," went on Temujin earnestly, "and you will not be marked by the flames. You are brave and hardy, I know. First, strip off these long garments, and put on no others. The heat is such that clothing will catch fire, and the man who wraps himself up will be marked."

When Mingan had rid himself of all garments, Temujin rose and added a low-voiced warning.

It would seem, when he was led to the fires, as if they were a solid mass of flames without interval of any kind. As a matter of fact they would consist of two lines of fires, some ten feet apart, but with the end of this lane nearest the victim closed by a heap of blazing brush.

If he leaped over this, he could then run swiftly through the narrow lane and come out unharmed. There was no wind, and the flames rose straight into the air. If he did not jump with all his strength, his feet would be caught in the brush and he would fall. To hesitate after he was once in the lane would be equally fatal.

"And do not hang back when you are led up to the fires, or twenty arrows will seek you out. Fear not, for only a weakling dies in this test."

Mingan nodded, and was surprized when the Mongol officer who had brought him food, asking consent of his chief, knelt in front of him and fell to chafing his legs vigorously, starting up the circulation in the stiffened limbs. Then he was led from the tent, through the gathering to where, in a cleared space between the tent-lines, flames crackled and smoke poured from small heaps of rushes and brush for a length of some fifty feet.

It looked, as Temujin said, as if the fires were in a solid mass, for the biggest pile in front of him gave forth a dense smoke that hid the lane of which his friend had spoken. For a second Mingan wondered if Temujin had tricked him.

But he was allowed no time for reflection. At one side of him he noticed the Jelairs, mounted on fine looking horses, watching him as he was conducted to the end of the fires. Some one gave him a push, and he sprang forward.

Taking off at the edge of the flames he leaped, drawing in his breath and holding it as he did so. A hot wave seemed to engulf him and his knees smarted. Then his feet came down upon cool earth, although the heat around him was unbearable.

Mingan stumbled, caught himself up, and ran on, his eyes stinging with the effort to keep them open in the smoke. In spite of himself, he was forced to close his eyes, while his legs still urged him forward.

He ran into something solid, felt himself clasped by mighty arms, and opened his eyes to gaze with blurred vision into the seamed face of a Mongol warrior at the edge of the crowd. The fires were a dozen paces behind him. Other men crowded about to inspect his skin for burns.

A shout announced that he had passed through the fire safely, and he was brought to where Jamuka was bidding farewell to Temujin.

"You are a fool, my cousin," he heard the thin Turk say, "to keep this Cathayan alive. He will work you harm. The spies of Chung-hi are thick as jackals in the trail of a hunt. I go to my lands, beside Tangut, the city of Prester John, whom you call Wang Khan."

"Will you go to the castle that is guarded by beasts?"

Laughing, Jamuka shook his head.

"Not I! A word of warning, stripling. Prester John is your foe, because he desires the mastery of the Horde. May the way be open before you!"

Temujin raised his hand silently and the Jelairs cantered off.

Mingan was taken to the Khan's tent, where he was clad in the rough Mongol garments, and more food was brought him by the warrior who had befriended him and who seemed anxious to observe how much he could eat.

Being hungry again, Mingan did justice to the milk and cheese, and the Mongol growled approvingly—

"He eats like a king of a great people."

Temujin, brooding beside him, glanced at him with keen surprize. But Mingan's head sank on his shoulder and drowsiness overcame him.

It was night when he was awakened by the sound of a groan near at hand. Temujin was sitting over a fire in the hearth of the small tent that reeked of leather and horses, his chin propped on his iron-bound arms, tears running down his cheeks.

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When Mingan stirred, the Mongol bent his head to hide his emotion.

"Except for a few, my palladins have left me. Will you abide with me, my first friend, and become my teller of tales? Unwillingly you came to my place, the country of the Three Rivers, yet your voice comforts me and your fellowship strengthens me."

For a long time Mingan stared into the embers, and then answered gravely—

"Aye, Temujin, for so long as the gods permit, I will remain at your side."

Fate, he thought, and the hand of Temujin, had brought him into the Horde, so that he could learn its secrets, and return to Cathay to place the knowledge he had gained on the step of the Dragon Seat, thus lending aid to the Dynasty of his father.

So the Cathayan boy reasoned, not knowing that it would be his lot to make out of his adventures in the Horde, a song to which kings would listen with bowed heads.

IV

THE RACE

TWO years passed, and Mingan found he was faced with a riddle that neither the wisdom of the sages nor the reading of the stars would help him unravel.

Of the five Mongol khans who had been faithful to Temujin, two died, and one fell sick of a wasting illness. Temujin's herds were thinned and of the best horses, kept near the *yurt* of the young chief, many disappeared in the night in spite of the most vigilant watch. True, the last Winter had been a hard one, the prairie swept by blizzards, and the rivers frozen over. The horse thieves had left traces of boots with heels fashioned of deers' hoofs, but none of the reindeer people had been in the Three Rivers country.

Temujin himself was tireless in his efforts, riding in snow or wind storm, from clan to clan of his tribe, leading his fighters in pursuit of the raiders who seemed to descend upon him from every quarter. He recruited supplies from raiding, in his turn, caravans that crossed the southern edge of his pasture lands bound to Cathay from India, gaining wine, weapons, cloth and camels that he sorely needed.

Once he was taken prisoner by riders who attacked his camp at night, but escaped, with the wooden yoke that was used by Tatars to confine their prisoners still on his shoulders. When his men had chopped off the *kang*, he sent it by an envoy to Mukuli saying that he would not keep the property of one who had been his ally.

It amused Mingan that old Mukuli gave the envoy a feast and sent back the message that he had nothing to do with the *kang*.

But from an unknown source, Temujin was still harrassed and Mingan knew now that it could not be by the horse thieves who had taken gold from Chung-hi.

And then came a messenger from Podu's camp, in the southern Gobi, to invite Temujin to a feast that would be shared by the other khans of the Horde.

Temujin had disappeared from the Mongol pastures, when his herds were nearest the gypsy lands more than once, and Mingan knew that he had taken the gray pony and gone to have speech with Burta. The last time he returned from his long ride he was moodier than usual. Podu, he said to Mingan, intended to give his daughter in marriage to a khan of the Horde within a few months, at the frost of the Autumn hunting season.

"The number of the Mongol *orkhons* is growing smaller," he meditated aloud. "The sword of an enemy is thinning our fellowship. Podu sees this—he is a great trafficker and trader."

It was the first time Temujin had mentioned the girl to his comrade, and Mingan asked a question—

"Do you wish for Burta to be your wife?"

Temujin's keen eyes darkened.

"I will take her."

"Not at the feast of Podu, in the next moon. You must not be among the assemblage at the feast. Your warriors are too few to protect you against your enemy, who will be there."

"What enemy? I have as many as a litter of dogs." The khan laid down the arrow he was whittling into shape and frowned. "What is your thought? No hidden thing must come like a snake between us."

Mingan, however, had not solved the riddle that perplexed him; so far, he could not put a name to the foeman who worked under cover of darkness, striking at Temujin each time with more deadly aim. Who

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were the riders who, purporting to be Tatars, had taken the Man of Iron captive to bear him alive to their master? Mukuli, the Tatar, would have slain the Mongol rather than take him prisoner.

And who were the raiders that left, instead of the tracks of men, the print of deers' hoofs in the snow?

"This is my thought," he explained frankly, knowing better than to conceal anything from Temujin who was intolerant of secrecy. "Instead of many foes, as you say, you have but one. His messengers of evil have taken the guise of other tribesmen. The *kang* was placed on your shoulders so that you would muster your standards against Mukuli, and so destroy yourself. The deers' hoofs were donned by the men of this enemy so that you would bear hatred against the reindeer people of the north, who had not come from their fastness in a month of moons."

He swept his hand before his eyes as if brushing away a veil.

"This foeman is wiser than you, and stronger. Who can tell his name?"

"If we go to the feast of the desert men, then we can make him uncover his face."

Thoughtfully Mingan shook his head. Although, in the Gobi, he had been deprived of books and his astronomical instruments, he had not lacked of knowledge. He had learned to train falcons and fly them at game, even the *bouragut*, the golden eagle that would pull down a deer. He was able to keep to the saddle for days, and he knew the prairies almost as well as Temujin who—perhaps because he could not read—never forgot what once he saw or heard. Hardship and constant suspense, holding himself ready to rouse up by night and take to the saddle and flee, had sharpened Mingan's keen wits.

"Like a play actor in Cathay this foeman has a mask over his face, and he would strike you before you could guard against him."

Temujin took up his arrow and fell to sharpening it. "Jamuka bade me beware of Wang Khan, Prester John, who is a Christian* and strongest of the lords of the west. Sixty times a thousand tents are on his lands. But he alone of the chiefs of the Horde dwells in a castle. He gives no feasts, nor does he ride forth from his hold; perhaps because he has under his hand treasure of gold, of silver, of carved ivory and sable furs, of jewelled saddles and fine, red leather. Yesukai, my sire, visited his castle, and at that time the beasts that guard it were chained—he could hear their snarling.

"Nevertheless many of his men died from the *burans*, the black sand-storms of the southern Gobi. He said that as they drew near to Tangut—the castle of Prester John—he saw it first on one hand, then on another, and oft-times in the air before his horse. He saw a rich land, with wide rivers and trees, though no trees stand in that quarter of the earth."

Neither Temujin nor Mingan had seen a mirage. Yet the Cathayan did not doubt Yesukai's words—he had learned the bluntness of the Mongols.

It was said that the master of the Kerait had been alive for many generations. Also that, since Prester John did not go forth from his castle, he sent a trusted leader in command of his horsemen, who—so that enemies might not know the faces of his lieutenants—wore the skin of an animal's head over his own.

"Did Yesukai see the god that Prester John worshiped?" Mingan asked.

It was said too, that the power of Prester John, the friend of Yesukai, had been due to a talisman that was closely guarded in his castle, but to Mingan this meant a god.

"Nay, my first friend, he saw gold cups, and a white cloth under them, and a bird with feathers of every color that talked like a man. That, to my mind is enough. When we go to Tangut we must be wary and look on every side, for Prester John has sent me no word, and I know not what is in his heart toward us."

Temujin lifted his head, and Mingan put behind him the lute that he was fingering.

A rider was passing between the rows of tents of the Mongol camp, glancing carelessly about. Seeing the yak-tail standard planted at Temujin's side, he wheeled toward it, and drew up sharply, the forefeet of his pony not a yard from the Mongol's knees. Temujin did not put his hand to a weapon, not liking to make a threatening gesture without intending to strike, or, for that matter, to give warning when he meant to use a weapon. He had noticed that the newcomer rode the pony that was Burta's special property—a sorrel mare.

*Kerait, or Krit, is the Mongol version of the word Christian.

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"O khan," said the messenger without dismounting, "I bear word to you from the daughter of Podu. Grant me freedom from harm, and I will dismount and speak; otherwise, the saddle suits me best and you will burn in the entrails of Erlik before you will catch this mare. Speak your mind."

He was a youngling, neat as a fawn from red morocco boot-tips to silver adorned sable-cap. His brown eyes danced in a round face and, as Temujin observed, the scabbard of his long simitar was set with sapphires.

"What name bear you, O sharp of tongue?"

"Chepe Noyon, O long of face."

"The Tiger Chief," Temujin repeated, grimly. "Sit, and drink, and speak, and fear not for your swaddling-clothes or the limbs in them. Whence had you that mare?"

"From the hand of Burta, who is like the moon in the sky at night," quoth the stranger, following out Temujin's suggestion without further reluctance.

Mingan judged from his attire that he might be Jelair or gipsy; at any rate his restlessness and his smooth, olive skin might well have earned him the surname of tiger.

"Burta sends this warning," the stranger continued. "Do not come to the feast of Podu, or the feasters will sprinkle your blood as a libation on the sand, and hang your skin on the tent ropes. At least that was her meaning, the words are of my fashioning."

Hereat the Tiger Lord paused to quaff deep of the mare's milk that Temujin's mother brought from the *yurt*. Catching sight of Mingan's lute, he brightened.

"You are no Gipsy," said Temujin bluntly. "What are you?"

"O khan, a Kerait, and a better man than your minstrel. I have a gold lute. Harken, lutist, come not to the sands of the Gobi, to the feast, to sing *ting-tang*, like the thrush, before the hawk swooped and the song-bird squawked by way of a last note. Get drunk and sleep in a wolves-lair if you will, but drink no wine of Podu's making."

"Wise counsel from a beardless mouth," smiled Mingan, and the Tiger—as they came subsequently to call him—looked up in surprize at the pleasant accent of the Cathayan. "Did the beauty of Burta bring you from the sands of Tangut—alone?"

"Alone as a lame fox, O minstrel. Nay, I set forth to find adventure, and heard before long of the great feast of Podu. When I rode thither the daughter of the chief smiled at me, and I was her slave. Would I might be among the suitors that Podu sorts out in his shrewd brain! But she gave me a quest, and I am here."

Mingan nodded politely, thinking that the Tiger, young as he was, could play a part as well as the Cathayans. Certainly the western chief was no fool, for as he spoke his eyes took in the camp shrewdly, sizing up the horses, the raw-hide armor of the Mongols, the weapons in Temujin's tent.

"Why alone," murmured Mingan, "if Prester John, your master, rides to the feast?"

"Not he. Nor his men. I tired of watching horses in our lands. Nay, give me the nomad's tents. O khan, if my words are clear, I mount to retrace my journey at sun-up. Have you a message?"

"Your words are clear," acknowledged Temujin promptly, "yet you will bear no message from me, for I will draw my reins to Podu's tents and speak for myself. If any fox sent you to turn me aside with your threats, I will give you your fill of adventuring."

The same thought had crossed Mingan's mind—that Chepe Noyon might have lied. As warranty of the boy's faith there was the sorrel mare and the Tiger himself. For certainly no spy could be so careless of events, or could chuckle so heartily as the Tiger at Temujin's warning.

"You pledged me freedom from harm," he pointed out, "and I have heard that Temujin forgets not, nor fails to keep a promise." The mirth faded from his clear brown eyes, and he glanced at Temujin as if seeing him for the first time. "I have caught rumors in the Gipsy tents, the black tents, that there will be a new khan over the Horde before the snow comes."

Mingan, too added his remonstrance, aware that Temujin had not men enough to insure his safety, nor—which was more to the point—to make an impressive display among the other chieftains. It struck him suddenly, comparing the young Kerait and the powerful Mongol, that Temujin was no longer a boy. Mingan did not know that he himself had grown in stature and wisdom to manhood.

"If I lurk in my tent like a dog," snarled

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the khan, "my enemies will take counsel together and elect a leader. Nay, I have a mind to the feast." He caught the Kerait suddenly by the wrist. "Tiger, you are bold and open in speech. Will you stand with me? When the snow comes, I will still be master of the Horde, and Burta will be in my tent. She waits until I take her from her father's *yurt*, and this shall be at the feast. Before the feast is ended," added Temujin dryly, "you may be in your grave, and Mingan too. Otherwise, you shall have honor rare in one of your years. Of my *orkhons* two are gone from the earth and one is ailing. The remaining two are needed to guard the herds at the Three Rivers and to watch the Tatars. That leaves no more than two or three *gurans** of riders to attend me, and no palladins. That is too few and too many—too few to guard me at the feast, too many Mongols to die. So we take three hundred picked men, a hundred to each of us."

Chepe Noyon flushed with pleasure, while Mingan nodded assent.

"As for *orkhons* to attend me, I will take two even though they be but sham heroes."

Temujin rose and went into his *yurt*, reappearing with two gold tablets in his hand, each engraved with an inscription. He gave the first to Mingan, the second to Chepe Noyon.

The Cathayan and the Kerait, surprized bent their heads and lifted their hands. Temujin's eyes were cold.

"I mean this as a truth. At the last *kurultai* of the Horde I swore that I would choose new heroes, rather than take back those who left me. Now, each of you is raised above other men; you are immune from punishment; you are inviolate from the death penalty nine times. Wherever you go in the country of the Horde, you will be honored; you are to command, each one, a *tuman* of ten thousand chosen warriors."

Mingan looked down at his tablet, and read the words—

PALLADIN OF THE MONGOL FELLOWSHIP

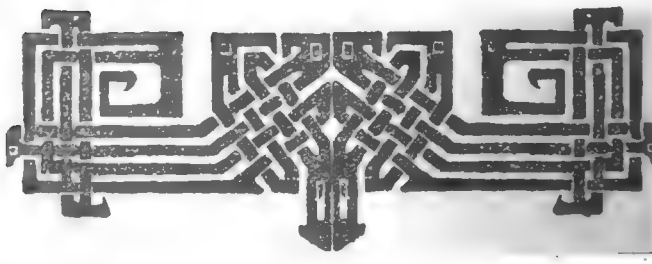
"Are you content?" Temujin's keen glance searched them. "Good. Guide and support each other, steal not and remember that a lie earns for others than the *orkhons* the death penalty. Be falcons, going before my coming, spying out what is hidden and the place of danger; be the harbingers of war—aye, of death. Never spare a foe who still has a sword in hand, waste no thought on the weak; learn to care for your men, and their ponies, for a brave man is useless if he aids not those under him."

He considered a moment.

"Take Chepe Noyon to your tent, Mingan, and share it with him. Then do you both choose a hundred to follow you, also the swiftest of our racing horses and the strongest wrestlers among our warriors for Podu's games."

TO BE CONTINUED

*Thousand.



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CROW VENGEANCE

by WILLIAM WELLS

Author of "The Raid," "Taming the Four Bad-Men," &c.

A CIRCLE of Indians, chiefs and warriors of the Crow nation, sat about the fire in the lodge of Broken Lance. Their robes, fallen back from their shoulders, showed their lean and wound-scarred torsos and the flickering flames lighted up their fierce faces, for these were members of the Panther Clan, the most noted fighters of their adventurous and widely-dreaded tribe.

With them sat Bannion the trader, adopted member of the tribe and clan, and held by even these wild raiders as worthy of the place. Six feet above their heads the smoke hung thick, fed both by the fire and by the pipe that passed from hand to hand, but below that the fresh cool air, entering under the outer wall and passing up between that and the six foot high inner lining of the lodge, made the smoke lie above it like a ceiling.

At the back of the lodge the two wives of Broken Lance sat silent, listening to the talk of the men and glancing from time to time at two fresh scalps, stretched on hoops and painted red, which, dimly seen through the waving smoke, hung from the lodge poles. Over Broken Lance's head his war weapons rested on a frame of slender willows, peeled white and gaily painted, and in honor of his guests he sat upright, not reclining on his slatted lazyback which lay behind him.

Broken Lance was speaking.

"Listen, brother of the Panther Clan," he said to Bannion. "You have been to the post for goods to trade to us for our robes and furs, and on your return you have asked why you do not see Swift Runner, your friend. So I will tell you how he passed, for he died as a Crow war chief should, and we brought home his body, no enemy having touched it save while the breath was still in him and his weapons in his hands, so that his women did not have to mourn disgrace or cut their breasts with knives."

MEAT was running short in the village (he went on) when one day hunters that had been far brought word of a great herd of buffalo that had come on to the plain near the three hills that lie to the westward, saying that they had not frightened them that we might make a surround.

So the next day all the men but those too old, and the boys and young men herding horses, went, for we felt safe, many scouts being out and the smokes telling that they had seen no enemy, nor would a small war-party raid the village in daylight. By the time that the shadows were the shortest we had surrounded the buffalo, making a great killing, and while we were resting and the women that had followed us were cutting up the meat and loading it on their pack-horses and travois we saw a rider coming from the camp as fast as his horse could run.

So we raced to meet him, and when we came close we saw that it was the Owl, Swift Runner's youngest son, his horse

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white with sweat and standing trembling, its head down and legs far apart, when it stopped.

The Owl told us that a band of Sioux had cut in between the village and the horse herds, killed the Owl's brother and one other of the boys, gathered many of the best horses and fled toward the Sioux country, for there were no men in the village able to pursue them, and had there been a few they had not dared leave the women and children unguarded.

When we heard this we rode hard for the village, but our horses were weary from chasing the buffalo, and a few of us whose horses were strong outran the rest. The sun was nearly down when we had reached the village, caught war horses and taken our war weapons, and as soon as thirty of us were ready we took the trail, following Swift Runner, for the old men said that there were only a score of the Sioux and Swift Runner would not wait for more.

We followed the trail until dark and then rode straight and hard for the Sioux country, not wishing to lose time and hoping to see the thieves, or the dust raised by their horses, during the next day. But we did not, and Swift Runner said that we should keep on at top speed and get so far ahead of the Sioux that we could stop and send out scouts to watch for them, and ambush them as they came on. So we rode all day and until the night was half-gone, stopping once to kill a buffalo and eat, and at other times to change horses—for each of us had a led horse—or to let the horses breathe a while, and feed and drink.

Then we stopped where there was grass and water, and each man lay wrapped in his robe until light, holding the rope of his horse in his hand and turning the other loose, for the free horses would not leave the others, and should an enemy come the horses would smell them and let us know. When it was light we killed another buffalo, and after we had eaten, four men took their fastest horses, leaving the others with us, two going to the right and two to the left, to ride as far as a horse could run while the sun moved a hand's breadth, and then to lie on a hill and watch. The rest of us went to a high hill where there were pines and lay there, some resting while the others watched.

And the spirits favored us, for while the shadows were still long we saw one of the men that had gone to the left come on to a hill and ride his horse in a circle. So we sent up the smoke agreed on—not smoke puffs, but a little smoke on the side of the pines toward where the men had gone to the right—so that the Sioux might not see it, or if they did think it nothing, and went to where the scout lay in the grass, having taken off the saddle that his horse might roll, for he had ridden hard. And the scout told us that they had seen, far toward our country, dust coming toward us.

Then we went to where the other scout lay on a hill, his horse feeding back under the crest, and we could see the dust, very far away. While we watched the two men that had gone to the right joined us, and Swift Runner said that we should ride toward the dust, looking for a place that the Sioux must pass, and there wait for them.

But the land here was low ridges with wide flats between and no cover in which to hide. Therefore we went on, with two scouts five arrow flights in advance, the scouts carefully creeping to the top of each hill before showing themselves and watching the country ahead before they crossed, the rest of us keeping out of sight until they signed us to come on.

Then the scouts, after looking from a hill, did not go on, but one of them crept back until he could stand erect behind the crest, and signed to us that they could see the Sioux. So we rode forward and, leaving our horses, crept up and looked over the ridge, hiding behind tufts of grass.

In front of us the ridge sloped down to a wide flat, and a little way out in the flat was a spot of green grass, showing water, and three buffalo bulls lying by it. Beyond the flat the ground ran upward in a long slant, and at the top of the far ridge was a cloud of dust coming toward us. Soon we could see the specks that were the led horses, the rest, and the Sioux driving them, being hidden by the dust. Before the horses reached the flat some of the Sioux came out of the dust and stopped them, two of the Sioux coming on toward the bulls, riding in a hollow that the bulls might not see them. By this we knew that the Sioux had not dared to stop and were very hungry, or they would not kill a tough old bull for food.

The two Sioux kept in the hollow until they were close to the buffalo, being hardly a bow shot distant when they came up out of the hollow, and the buffalo, seeing them,

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scrambled up and started to run. But the Sioux lashed their horses and riding alongside the bulls killed one with a lance.

Then the rest of the Sioux drove the horses down to the water, and, turning loose the horses that they rode, caught others and saddled them before they cut meat from the bull and ate it raw, for there was no dry wood for a fire, and had they used the buffalo chips lying around there would have been smoke. While they were eating the Sioux stood by their horses watching their back trail and we could see that the faces of two of them were painted black, showing that they were the ones that had killed and scalped the boys.

When Swift Runner saw them he would have had us ride down on the Sioux at once, but the rest of us said that the Sioux had the freshest horses and that we could not close with them in the flat, but that they would escape.

At this Swift Runner would have mounted his horse and ridden down alone, saying that no Crow warrior should stand idle while the scalp of his son hung on an enemy's lance in his sight, for we could now see the scalps fastened to the lances that the Sioux had stood upright in the sod while they ate. Still we would not let him go, planning how we could close with the Sioux and kill them all, and Swift Runner standing in thought with a face like that of a trapped wolf.

Then said Swift Runner—

"Men of the Crows, my son's scalp is yonder, and I must kill him that took it, that his scalp, and that of my son, be taken back to the Crow country so that my son can rest in the land of the dead and not be disgraced.

"Therefore I will ride down alone and challenge the Sioux to fight, and after I have killed him and taken his scalp I will charge into the thick of the rest, as it will then be my right to do, and while I am fighting them, and their eyes are on me and seeing nothing else, the rest of you shall come and it may be that you can close with them and kill them all.

"I have two other sons, and many horses, so that when I am dead my women and children shall not want for food.

So we said nothing more, and Swift Runner mounted his horse and rode slowly over the crest of the hill into the sight of the Sioux, holding his lance erect and letting his shield hang at his saddle bow. When the Sioux first saw Swift Runner they leaped on their horses, and then, seeing only one man sat on them and let Swift Runner approach. When Swift Runner was close he reined up his horse.

"You Sioux dogs that are killers of boys," he said, "I am Swift Runner, a war chief of the Crows. You have killed my son and taken his scalp, and I have outridden you that I may kill the man that has it, and avenge my son."

The Sioux chief rode forward to meet Swift Runner.

"We have two Crow scalps; will you fight both the men that carry them?" he asked.

"I will fight them both at once," said Swift Runner, "but I ask that you let me see the scalps before we fight, that I may kill the man that carries that of my son the first of the two."

"You croak loud, Crow," said the Sioux chief, "but we shall soon have three Crow scalps instead of two," and he turned back and the two Sioux with the blackened faces came forward, holding out their lances that Swift Runner might look at the scalps.

We could see Swift Runner stiffen in his saddle as he looked at the scalp of his son.

"Take your last look at earth," he said to the Sioux on whose lance it was," and wheeling his horse rode back to gain charging distance.

As he turned to face them the two Sioux dropped their lance points and lashed their horses with the whips that hung from their left wrists, but Swift Runner's horse charged without lashing, running belly to the ground, for it had carried its rider in many battles and loved fighting.

Swift Runner bent low over his horse's neck, his shield up to cover his face and shoulders, and with such force did the horse come that Swift Runner's lance passed clear through the shield and deep into the neck where it joined the shoulder, of the Sioux he aimed at. And though the lance point of the Sioux pierced the shield of Swift Runner, Swift Runner twisted in his saddle to avoid it, seizing the lance and tearing from it the scalp of his son. And so fast had Swift Runner's horse charged that the other Sioux made a bad lance thrust, the blade glancing from the shield of Swift Runner and cutting his horse on the hip.

Then Swift Runner's horse, screaming with rage, set all four feet deep into the sod,

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and stopping suddenly, whirled and dashed at the horse of the second Sioux, which the rider was trying to wheel to face Swift Runner. When the Sioux saw that he could not turn to meet the charge he dropped his lance, and going down on his horse's side pulled bow and arrow, but as he did so the horse of Swift Runner reared and smashed down on the horse of the Sioux with both front feet, crushing them to the ground, and Swift Runner, leaning down, brained the Sioux with his war-ax.

Now Swift Runner, leaping from his horse, ran to the Sioux he had killed first and took the scalp, holding it up with the scalp whoop, and did the same to the other, the rest sitting in their saddles and watching, for Swift Runner had won in fair fight. When he had taken the scalps Swift Runner placed them in his belt and the scalp of his son in the breast of his war shirt, and mounting his horse faced the Sioux.

"Defend yourselves, killers of boys," he shouted, and before they could charge Swift Runner drove an arrow through the ribs of the Sioux chief.

"The Crows can strike as well as croak, dogs of Sioux," Swift Runner shouted again, and dropping his bow he sent his horse straight at their midst, chanting his death song and holding his war-ax ready.

WE HAD already brought our horses up under the crest of the hill, and when Swift Runner did this we ran to them, mounted, and came over the crest in a line, but in silence.

As we rode all that we could see was a tangle of plunging horses, above which war-axes flashed, but we heard Swift Runner shout the Crow war cry once, and as we answered it we dropped our lance points and drove them into the backs and sides of the Sioux, for as Swift Runner had said, all their eyes were on him, for none saw us save as they died on our lances.

Not a Sioux escaped, but all lay by the water, while of us not one was hurt but Swift Runner, who lay dead, he and his war horse, among the Sioux.

So we took the scalps, and lashing on to a horse the body of Swift Runner, who had taken the scalp of his son from his breast and held it in his hand as he died, we came back to our village. And before we gave the bodies of Swift Runner and his son our tribal burial, we took the scalp of his son from Swift Runner's clasp and placed it on the head of the son, so that both could come to the land of the dead without shame.

CHEYENNE

by Frank H. Huston

CHEYENNE, a straggling collection of tents in '67, was noted for years for its shooting and gambling propensities as well as for its liberality and public spirit and the typical Western characters that made it their stamping-ground.

Tim Dye with his celebrated "eating-house" with his sign:

Meals	$1.00
Square Meal	2.00
All You Want	3.00

Cherokee Bob was an aged attenuated plainsman, with buckskin garments loosely draping his scrawny form and tied together with bits of whang and string, his ventilated hat, that "lets the air in an' the bugs out," famous for his stories of the "old days" and his capacity for "40 rod."

"Old Zip Coon" was the center of every convivial occasion in the Territory with his droopy mustache, squeaky fiddle and squeakier, high-pitched voice.

Occasionally Calamity Jane would ride in, stomp in her man's cowhide boots into the nearest saloon, "belly up" to the bar and toss off with practised hand a "stiff snorter" of red-eye.

Dozens of others of more or less fame could be encountered any day "across the track."

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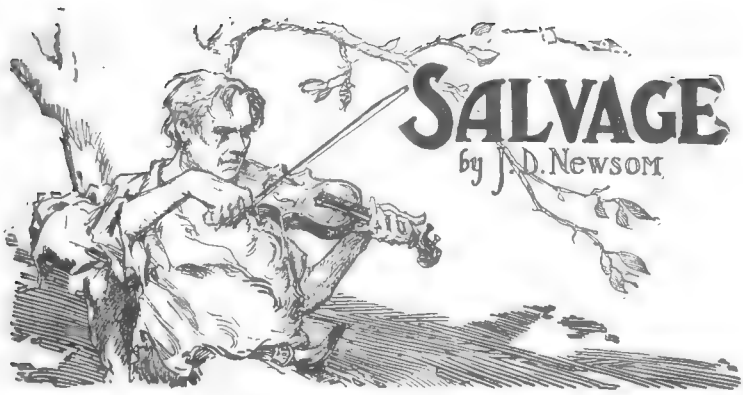

Author of "Tapir," "A Bit of Breeding," etc.

ACCORDING to Mosaic Law the sins of the father are visited upon the children unto the third and the fourth generations. Probably, this threat was originally meant to apply in the Hereafter as conceived by the fevered imaginations of Semite prophets, but by common consent the ungenerous living have seen fit to enforce this punishment upon earth. The result is obvious—the most unmitigated scoundrel, whose parents manage to scrape through without straining the statutes of the particular society in which they live, always has a run for somebody else's money; but the poor fellow who for any of a thousand reasons is born under a shadow goes from cradle to grave cursed for another man's hypothetical evil doings.

Sentimentalists may argue that this puts a brake on the escapades of parents; in point of fact it does not. Who ever heard of a would-be murderer or thief being deterred from his purpose because his offspring might some day suffer if he were found out and went to the chair or spent twenty years in prison? Like so many other beautiful thoughts it reads well but acts very badly indeed.

Jérome Larade knew nothing of the Mosaic laws of cumulative retribution, but he knew that he suffered and suffered acutely because his father had been a convict serving a life sentence at the penitentiary on the island of New Caledonia where France used to send her outcasts.

Not that Larade senior had committed any atrocious crime; he was neither assassin, forger nor thief. During the siege of Paris in 1871, at eighteen, he had been drafted into the army and when the aftermath of defeat, the *commune*, swept the city he had been detailed to shoot down the rebels. The latter had been marched in droves to the Père Lachaise cemetery where, against a certain high stone wall, they were mowed down with much speed but little precision.

Larade firing mechanically had suddenly seen his cousin, a boy like himself, facing him with horrified, wide-open eyes, and he had thrown his hot rifle down at his sergeant's feet. Its butt, rebounding, had struck the noncommissioned peasant's ankle. Larade was arrested, convicted of such ominous offenses as mutiny and striking a superior officer, and had been shipped to New Caledonia to expiate his heinous offense. Somebody else, of course, shot his cousin.

After submitting his body and his mind to thirty years of what is technically called "repressive punishment," in close contact with the most vicious of its criminals, a forgiving society had decided that he was partially cured and had turned him loose on the island that he might starve at leisure.

Being an obstinate man he refused to starve. Instead he cleared a patch of land on the outskirts of Nouméa and married the daughter of a rum pedler who was only too pleased to be rid of such a hindrance to his nomadic ways. In the course of time Jérome

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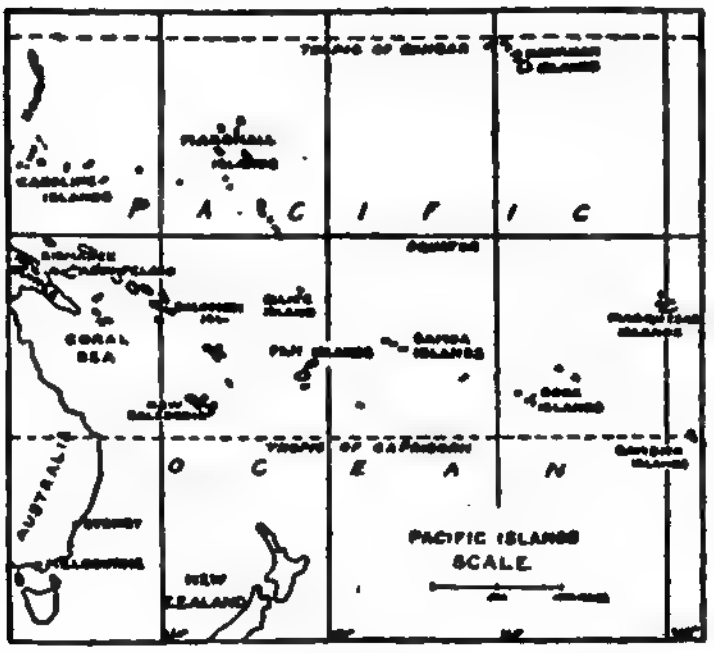
ran about among the splintery legs of the home-made furniture. Larade lived long enough to teach his son how to play the violin very indifferently and then died of tuberculosis.

His wife soon found that she could not manage a growing boy and attend to the garden both at the same time. Moreover, she was only the lawful wife of a jailbird and as such worthy of no consideration whatsoever, so she too died and left Jérome with a twenty franc fiddle and a doubtful blessing.

He kept the priceless fiddle and tramped to Nouméa where his reception was as cool as the sun was hot, and he was given the run of the garbage cans, which he shared with civilized Kanakas, to sustain him. Occasionally he found an over-ripe banana or the



core of a once luscious pineapple. These were novel delicacies and he struggled along, very thin, very quiet, an eternal question behind his vague, apprehensive brown eyes.

He played before the cafés bordering the Square of the Coconut Trees collecting sometimes as much as ten sous a day until the police gave him to understand that neither his music nor his presence were desirable in such a fashionable neighborhood. Then, without ostentation, he starved. But at fifteen even starvation has its interesting side, and he explored the garbage cans with renewed zest.

Aristide Goullier came across him one morning in the shadow of Government House, his violin under one arm, digging with both hands through the remains of the Colonial Secretary's late supper.

Goullier was a man of business; he ran a noisy restaurant at Nepuaru, on the east coast of the island, where there were nickel mines and stamping mills and other outward and visible signs of prosperity. He needed a musician to keep up the reputation of his café—the "Petit Paris"—and Jérome looked quite cheap.

"You play that thing?" he asked in a hoarse whisper, pointing a stumpy forefinger at the fiddle.

Jérome looked up into the swarthy face and smiled enthusiastically at the first white human being that had taken the slightest notice of his existence for months past.

He assured the gentleman that he undoubtedly could play—anything, anything at all, from Gounod's "Nazareth," which was frightfully difficult, to "La Madelon." At the moment he would have announced himself capable of leading the Royal Orchestra of Vienna.

Goullier waved this information aside.

"What about fancy music?" he demanded. "Happy stuff to make people want to eat and drink?"

"Ah," exclaimed Jérome who at the moment could have eaten his way through the toughest "rosbif" ever cooked, "I know what *monsieur* wants!"

And without invitation he played "Softly Awakes My Heart" as if he were serenading a cook; his feet wide apart in the rubbish on the sidewalk. He used too much tremolo for his execution to be at all artistic, and it was not fancy stuff, but it appealed to Goullier.

"What do you do for a living?" he inquired briskly.

Jérome shrugged his shoulders.

"I do nothing, and if *monsieur* could give me work—"

"Don't do anything!" growled Goullier, studying the ragged figure before him. "Lazy, eh?"

When he discovered that Jérome was a convict's son he puffed out his cheeks and violently shook his head.

"No good, no good to me," he declared. "Couldn't employ you."

"But," wailed Jérome, "I have done nothing, *monsieur*. I want to work!"

"You do?" Goullier seemed astonished at this statement. "Well, I take you on trial. Give you board and lodging. You learn a trade. No wages, naturally."

"Truly?" asked Jérome, not believing his ears.

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"What do you take me for? Of course I mean it. And I'll pay your fare on the boat to Nepuaru, too."

THUS it came about that Jérome was apprenticed to Aristide Goullier. His position at the "Petit Paris" was sufficiently indeterminate to make him useful in a hundred ways. He mucked out stables, fed and watered horses, washed dishes, swept floors and from seven until two in the morning ground out tunes in the reeking dining-room to the accompaniment of three guitars played by dazzling creatures in magnificent dresses conspicuous for their brevity. Jérome's orders were to walk down the aisles between the tables after each number and collect tips; these he handed over to Goullier to pay for his tuition.

And Goullier had undergone a marked change. At Nepuaru he used both fists and a roasting spit to enforce his orders and he reduced Jérome to a dreary state of apathy, keeping him just sufficiently nourished that the boy might be able to stay on his feet about seventeen hours a day without collapsing. Starvation would have been preferable, but as Goullier had explained between clenched teeth—

"Run away, you little *crapule*, and I shall have you arrested, like that!"

He snapped his fingers.

"I'll have you put in prison, you seed of crime, if I hear a single complaint out of you. Anybody else but me would have left you to rot in the gutter. You'll thank me some day."

On the strength of past experience Jérome believed him and hoped for nothing better than oblivion.

He slept in an odoriferous garret above the stables, which he shared with Lampied, as hopeless a piece of flotsam as had ever been cast up by the Pacific. Lampied was old, ragged and filthy; he drank immoderately whenever he could lay hands on a bottle and his heart was weak which made him nearly useless. Goullier gave him odd little jobs to do involving the use of a knife, which tasks required no great exertion except that of waiting by night behind walls or bushes.

He treated Jérome with facetious brutality until the boy discovered that if he played certain songs very softly, making the fiddle throb like a lost soul, he could break down Lampied's outer crust of callousness and reduce him to tears of self-mortification. Jérome lost more sleep, but while the mood lasted he gained a world-wise counsellor.

One evening, stupid for want of sleep, he staggered up the ladder and made his way to the garret window where he rested his chin on the sill and watched the dying day. Down in the bay red flames stabbed through the purple shadows and a muffled clangor, steady as a beating heart, came from the smelting factory. At the water's edge strung out like bright beads, a row of lamps marked Nepuaru's one street stretching from the wharf where the freighters loaded nickel ore to the police station, as prim and angular and futile as an old maid, standing at the head of the fjord-like bay. In the center of the fairway a schooner swung at anchor, its black hulk dim and vague in the twilight.

To the east beyond the wharf, beyond the moaning bar stretched the Pacific, its deep blue mingling on the horizon with the blue of the darkening sky. Westward lay the empty hills of New Caledonia, forest-grown, silent, mass upon mass of tormented ridge and crest and peak, catching here and there a faint golden glow from the sinking sun. Long since the last Kanaka tribe had left Nepuaru, going north to new homes they had not chosen, far removed from the nickel-bearing lands of the district. Where their village had once stood there was now a quarry, a great, raw gap in the hillside which seemed to eat its way forward day by day.

The garret behind Jérome was in darkness. From the stables came the occasional sound of a kicking hoof and the steady *munch*, *munch*, *munch* of the horses he had just fed. Beneath the rafters at the far end of the room lay Lampied, hands crossed behind his head, sprawling full length on a straw-filled mattress.

Jérome sighed as he turned impatiently from his contemplation of the bay and lit a candle stuck in the neck of a bottle.

"The child is restless," commented Lampied. "He dreams. You're an imbecile if you dream, my boy. Waste of good time. What's bothering you?"

"That boat down in the harbor—" began Jérome, struggling with the buttons of the soiled red tunic he wore in the evening.

"Ha!" laughed Lampied. "I see—nostalgia. You fool," he went on bitterly.

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"You'll never get a chance to travel. Nepuaru will be my grave and yours. You're branded. Yes, branded. You'll know all about it in a few years' time. Wait until you are conscripted! Won't your companions help you to forget it! Not they. You're branded, I tell you. Yes, yes, yes—" his voice died away to a mumbling whisper until he raised himself on an elbow and leered at Jérome.

"You're interested in that schooner are you?" he asked. "Other people are going to be interested in it too before long."

"She's loading nickel, I suppose."

"Nickel! My poor boy, you observe nothing. Nickel! She is loading timber—Strachan's timber. He could not get a single New Caledonian to handle his wood. He's had to get an American trader from the Hebrides to do his work.

"And they are going to be surprized, these foreigners—surprized—surprized——"

He gloated for a while, head thrown back, his tangled beard pointing ceilingward.

"What kind of a surprize?" asked Jérome, groping under his cot for his violin.

Lampied's voice, suddenly venomous and sharp, brought him to his feet for the old man had a habit of striking unexpectedly from behind.

"You make me talk too much," Lampied snarled, sitting up, trembling with anger. "Questions all the time. I'd like to see the last of you, you gutter rat! What if I did tell you—you'd give me away—give me away—" he fell back, coughing weakly.

For a time he lay quite still, gasping as he struggled for air, and an oppressive silence filled the room, accentuated by the ceaseless mutter of the stamping mills, which was felt rather than heard.

"My heart," he choked. "It's your fault, all your fault."

"I said nothing——"

"Don't argue. I'm—I'm all upset. I'm sick. Don't excite me. I must not be excited. I must be soothed. Play something, boy."

"But it's time for me to go to the dining-room," objected Jérome. "It's nearly seven. If I am late——"

"They won't miss you," sneered Lampied. "Nobody would miss a ghost like you. And I want to be amused. If you don't, I'll tell Goullier about the salted meat—you must have stolen pounds——"

"I did not!"

"Oh, well, but you *might* have done," grinned Lampied. "The *patron* will take my word for it. Well?"

Jérome drew his bow across the strings and the old man lay back on his mattress, a malicious twinkle in his watery eyes. But the twinkle vanished under the magic of the fiddle and before long he pillowed his face in the hollow of his arm and cried with the shameless indifference of the utterly wretched, for Jérome was playing a folk-song of Quimper, playing it as if inspired, playing with absolute indifference to his surroundings as if he were himself in the Brittany conjured up by the tune, leading a procession——

"Going down to the sea,
To bless the fishing nets."

All at once Lampied jumped to his feet and struck the bow from Jérome's hand.

"Are you mad?" he demanded roughly. "That's all right for the *communiantes*, but—but——"

He turned away in desperation.

"My ——, you and your white face! You make me remember things—and I mustn't. Not now, not now——"

He talked on, trying to revive his own courage:

"There's Strachan. I'm going to get that *Angliche*, get him! Fifty francs, that's what his skin is worth—fifty."

"You aren't going——"

"Silence," breathed Lampied, looking fearfully toward the trap door.

Then Goullier was in the garret, convulsed and roaring. He made straight for Jérome and struck him, shook him, pinched him.

"Wasting time!" he bellowed. "My time. Losing tips! Standing here dreaming!"

"He would not go," put in Lampied, standing round-shouldered before his master, rubbing his trembling hands together. "I warned him. I said: 'My boy, it is after seven o'clock. The *patron* will be needing you.'"

"What can you expect—convict's brood. No good. Get down there, you good for nothing. Get down and play! For two sous I'd break the fiddle over your head. Hurry!"

Jérome was really afraid of Goullier; his dread of the man was blind and unreasoning, akin to a savage's fear of thunder and lightning, awful but inevitable, part and parcel of the incomprehensible scheme of

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things. But old Lampied was different; Jérome had seen him drunk and sober, weak and strong, brutal and craven—a human being, in fact, with a human being's failings. And Lampied had lied to save his own neck; Lampied had boasted that he would get fifty francs for Strachan's skin. Jérome knew what that meant.

Strachan would be found one day with a thin-lipped wound in his back where a knife had slipped through to his heart, and the police would become nervously excited for a time and blame the coolies down at the mills. Nothing further would happen, such things had occurred before. But Strachan——

At the foot of the ladder, standing in the warm darkness of the stables, Jérome paused, listening to the sound of voices that drifted down from the garret.

"He's going to sleep at his camp tomorrow night," Goullier was saying in his hoarse whisper. "They'll be hauling the logs early the next morning."

"Why not let me do the job here?"

"Here? A thousand times no! I don't want the police to suspect me—or you. He'll be in that tent of his, you know where, on the hillside just above the stack of mahogany."

"If he's alone, it is going to be easy."

"Oh, that American may be with him—Martindale. You have nothing to fear. That man is only half-awake. You should see him in the restaurant—he sits there like a piece of Strachan's wood. If he gives you any trouble—stick him too."

"Stick him too, stick him too," repeated Lampied as if hypnotized by the sound of the words.

"Well?"

"All for fifty francs?" asked Lampied in a wheedling, unctuous voice.

"Give you another twenty-five for the American," grunted Goullier. "He's not worth more than that, not a sou."

"Thank you, *monsieur*, thank you," Lampied sounded as if a favor were being thrust upon him. "Monsieur is very kind."

"You'll find out about that if you bungle," retorted Goullier. "Now I must get down to the restaurant. It's packed to the doors. Better lend a hand in the kitchen if that —— heart of yours will stand the strain of a little work. Take a peep at Strachan's friend."

Jérome fled across the courtyard, through the kitchen and into the café. No one noticed him; no one glanced at his white, shiny face where the brown eyes stared out unseeing through the fog of tobacco smoke.

THE "Petit Paris" was indeed crowded. On the terrace overlooking the harbor the more sedate members of the community were playing cards, backgammon and chess. Inside, at the far end of the room was a roulette board surrounded by an intent, rapacious throng above whose heards droned the croupier's monotonous chant—

"*Rien ne va plus, messieurs.*"

Cheek by jowl with the gamblers stood a billiard table where the elderly manager of the mines was contending with the secretary of the smelting factory.

Beyond, from wall to wall, right up to and encircling the platform where the musicians sat, the place was cluttered with little tables whose occupants kept up a constant clamor for wine and warm beer and Pernod.

Nearly in the center of the room sat Strachan and Martindale. Over and across and around them people were talking, laughing, shouting, but by common accord Strachan was left out of the conversation. He was snubbed, yet he did not seem to notice it. Strachan was impervious to insults. His complacency was colossal. His red, jovial face expressed the most complete self-absorption and he talked to Martindale as if he were addressing a great and enthusiastic audience.

"Yes," he was shouting, "I heard about the shortage of better class woods when I was in Sydney. Now, I'm not in the timber business myself, no, my line's crude oils, but I always say a man should be versatile. Well, what did I do, you wonder? Well, sir, I used my eyes and my ears. Yes, sir, I certainly did. With good results if I may say so.

"I popped over to the Board of Trade, I popped over to see the Chamber of Commerce people. Bless me, everybody was saying the same thing! New Zealand's not exporting *kauri* wood, teak's hard to get, so's mahogany. And nobody even thinking of New Caledonia—only five days from Sydney. No, sir, not one man. But I'm a live wire, don't make any mistake about that. I said to myself—what's the nearest source of supply? I popped over to the

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library and there it was in black and white—New Caledonia. So I caught the first boat, planked down my money—and weren't they precious glad to see some real money?—and there you are!"

"What's the idea of rafting out the logs?" asked Martindale. "Why can't you load from the wharf?"

He was a gaunt, bony man, whose harsh weather-beaten face reminded Strachan of carved granite. He sat in his chair, his large hands resting on his knees, and seemed rooted, immovable, except for his slate-gray eyes which belied the passive ease of the whole body.

"Oh, the manager of the mills owns the wharf. His concern also owns some land behind mine. Lots of people own land behind *my* concession. And what d'you know—they think they've been slighted because I was bright enough to come out here with contracts in my pocket and get to work while they were letting the timber go to waste."

"So they're making things nasty, are they?"

"Don't you believe it," asserted Strachan. "I get on famously with everybody except that one idiot, famously."

But his judgment was biased. He was a source of incredible irritation to the small community and his very presence was offensive. He had crowed over them and laughed at them, expounding his ideas of big business until they had sickened of the sound of his voice. Moreover, he controlled the road to the sea and stubbornly refused a right of way to his competitors. This he said was perfectly legitimate and the lawful fruit of his forethought.

He had even written a letter on the subject to Nouméa's one newspaper, and its editor, chuckling with delight, had printed it. The conflict assumed enormous proportions. It became confused with the adverse-rate-of-exchange controversy, and the right of foreigners to exploit the resources of the colony.

Lawsuits were begun to force him to grant his adversaries a passage from the hills to Nepuaru, which was the only suitable harbor within thirty miles, north or south. He blamed these attacks on the people's insularity, found excuses for their narrow-mindedness and went his way quite unaware of the gathering storm. He had chartered Martindale's schooner to carry the first load of timber to Sydney and he was at peace with all mankind.

But Goullier owned a tract of mahogany-bearing land just behind Strachan's concession, and Goullier's methods were peculiarly his own. Unlike Strachan he knew when to keep his mouth shut tight, but he also knew how to act to the best of his own interests. Nor was he alone in his determination to be rid of the obstructor. Vigot, the trader, and Bourrel, a blacksmith down at the mills, were ready with an alibi should Lampied need one.

Jérome's conscience was not a finely-attuned instrument; he could stand by passively and watch Lampied maturing cunning plans without any great mental inconvenience to himself, but Strachan was unlike any man he had ever heard of, and his spirit cried out as he played that evening. For Strachan was always cheerful, always laughing; he treated Jérome as if he were a fellow-creature, not the son of a convict. Often he would toss a ten franc tip on to the musician's plate without so much as an afterthought. He was rich, mighty; he could afford to stride through the café wholly indifferent to the sullen glances that followed him. To Jérome he was magnificent, legendary.

Several times that evening Goullier sent him the rounds of the tables collecting money, but he could not bring himself to approach Strachan and his companion. He felt dimly that something terrible would happen if he warned them. To do so would involve laborious explanations shouted aloud. With foreigners it was always like that, seemingly. One had to shout at them to make them understand the simplest thing.

In Jérome's mind new ideas were struggling for expression. All the craven apathy within him urged him to be still, adjured him to avoid change, reminded him of Goullier's dreadful wrath, of his own past hungry days. But there was also a new voice that begged to be heard. It spoke of the hopeless future at Nepuaru and cried to him to break away.

Goullier settled the matter for him.

"Are you blind tonight?" he asked savagely. "Where's Strachan's money?"

Jérome gulped and shuffled uneasily as he looked down at Goullier who stood resting both hands on the edge of the platform.

"Take the plate and touch him for five francs," whispered Goullier, "or I'll break

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every bone in your rotten body. Don't steal it either."

His violin under his left arm, the plate in his hand Jérome went mechanically from table to table until quite suddenly he found himself before Strachan and his heart thudded wildly in his throat.

"For the musicians, please," he said in a flat voice, extending the plate.

The American, Martindale, was looking at him queerly, he thought, looking through him, weighing him. But Strachan was digging in his pocket for change while he grinned with all his gold-filled teeth.

"The great violinist, Jérome," he laughed, speaking slowly in French. "Here are five francs, *mon garçon*. Now you *jouez*—play, *comprenez*—you play the 'Rule Britannia,' for me."

"Quick, listen," whispered Jérome, horrified at his own boldness. "You are in danger——"

"What's that?" demanded Strachan, smiling more broadly than ever.

These stupid foreigners! They understood nothing. People were beginning to stare and whisper. Well, it had to be done now——

"You are in danger!" Jérome cried at the top of his voice. "They will assassinate you. Do you understand—a knife in the back! Yes, Monsieur Strachan, they will kill you."

And Strachan, sitting back in his chair, roared with laughter until tears trickled down the net-work of wrinkles about his eyes!

THE "Petit Paris" was deathly still, people were standing up at the back of the room, even the croupier was silent, and Goullier with pained astonishment written plain on his face was coming down the aisle with the slow, heavy tread of impending doom.

"Oh, you funny blighter," gasped Strachan.

He turned to Martindale.

"What a joke, my, what a joke! Who ever heard of such a thing? I wonder who put him up to it? It's too amusing for words!"

Martindale, however, was impassive. He stretched out one bony hand and drew the boy to his side.

"Where did you hear this?" he asked. "Where? Quick!"

"I heard——"

Then Goullier reached them and silenced Jérome with a blow in the mouth. He bent over at the waist as he humbled himself before Strachan.

"The boy is mad," he apologized. "So much trouble he gives! *Mon Dieu, messieurs*, I offer excuses, all my apologies. Always I have to reprimand the young bandit, but never before has he dared in the café— He is the son of a convict, you will understand. I will teach him reason. I will put him out."

"That's all right," answered Strachan, waving away the whole incident. "Do not be too hard on the boy. It is a good joke, is it not?"

"A joke!" exclaimed Goullier, grinding his fingers into Jérome's arm. "This is no place for servants to joke. No, not with my customers. The 'Petit Paris' has a reputation."

He was dragging Jérome away when Martindale's drawling voice halted him:

"One minute, *patron*. Don't strangle the boy just yet and stay here until I get this into my head."

He addressed Jérome—

"Now, where did you hear this story?" he asked.

But Jérome could not answer coherently. His god, Strachan, was a fool. The man had guffawed when told that his life was menaced and had handed him over to Goullier who would surely kill him. And Martindale looked glum, forbidding, too frigid and slow to understand the acuteness of the situation.

"He will beat me!" he wailed. "Please tell him to let me go, please!"

At near-by tables noisy people were beginbing to complain. They glared at Martindale. Could the American not allow the proprietor to manage his own affairs? And that snivelling boy was a nuisance. Twenty voices said as much.

Goullier kicked Jérome before him toward the kitchen, but he was suddenly astonished to feel his own legs being struck from behind by heavy square-toed boots. He spun around angrily to find Martindale, gaunt and mournful, taking deliberate aim for another blow.

"If you do that again," Martindale was saying sadly. "I'll kick you down into the bay. It's a long drop, boss."

"Monsieur kicked me!" roared Goullier,

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who understood no English. "Monsieur dares to kick me!"

And the "Petit Paris" was in an uproar. Customers were dashing to Goullier's assistance and Jérome, watching his chance, bolted across the terrace and fled down the empty road.

"*Monsieur* must leave instantly," Goullier was roaring. "I will not have *monsieur* in my establishment."

Then as Strachan thrust his way through the press to Martindale's side, the incensed inn keeper went on:

"And that one too. Out you both go."

"See what you've done?" complained Strachan. "See this mess? Got to get out. Not another pub in Nepuaru. Why start all this rumpus just because somebody pulls your leg for a bit of a joke? It's not natural. I'm a peaceful man, I am."

"One fine joke," murmured Martindale in no way abashed by the stormy crowd. "Glad I ain't got your sense of humor, but I'm——"

"Will *monsieur* go?" shrieked Goullier. "Instantly!"

"Oh, say," Martindale looked up without show of emotion. "Where do you get that stuff?"

He tried out his French on the man. "You hit boy, I hit you. *Très bien* like that. You hit hard, me too."

"Ah," Goullier shouted, addressing his intent audience. "He is a brute. He will not leave my establishment. He will not give us tranquility. I appeal to your good sense, *messieurs*."

"This looks like the bum's rush," sadly commented Martindale. "Can you stand a shock, Mr. Strachan?"

"It's your fault, and if I must go I'm going quietly, with dignity. I want my bag.

"M. Goullier, I quite understand your sentiments," he went on, declaiming loudly, "but let us not forget the great Entente which binds us——"

"Entente! *Voilà* l'Entente!" snarled Goullier, and the crowd closed in, laying rough hands on the disturbers of the peace.

Somehow Martindale reached the road first without other injuries than a bleeding nose, but Strachan who came hurtling behind him was wild and disheveled, roused at last to raging fury.

At the mob which was cheering its own victory he shook both fists and bellowed back insult for insult. He reached the chattering stage when from a second story window his valise came flying; it fell at his feet and burst, scattering its contents all across the road.

"Come on, Martindale," he shouted. "Come on, let's fight 'em! Let's go for 'em and clean the place up."

Martindale blinking a little, shook his head dolefully. He stood looking at the row of excited faces lining the terrace railing, much as a visitor to the zoo might watch the antics of monkeys.

"Nope," he drawled. "Better leave 'em alone. Race riots aren't my hobby."

"Hobby!" wailed Strachan. "Hobby! Are you going to allow that bunch of undersized, half-baked lunatics to get the best of you?"

"Well—" Martindale sighed regretfully. "Like this—in cold blood, I don't quite feel I could——"

"In cold blood!" Strachan danced with anger. "He says 'in cold blood!' Oh, my sainted aunt!"

Then with a quick side-long glance at his companion, he bent down and collected his belongings, murmuring the while something about "these big fellows" and "cold feet."

"Come along," he ordered sharply. "Let's get out of this if you won't tackle them. Bless us! A man your size! And blast it, there's not another pub in the place. I'll have to sleep up at the camp and rough it. Oh, blast it!"

"Guess I'll join you, if you don't mind," said Martindale, quite cool and friendly.

"Don't fancy going down to the waterfront alone, eh? Oh, all right," Strachan grunted disgustedly. "Come with me. Tent's big enough for two."

They hurried away along the road skirting the ridge and were soon groping their way through the darkness toward a black hillside which rose at the foot of Nepuaru Bay.

Goullier watched them disappear into the shadows, made a hoarse little speech to his clients on the rights of man, and went back to the kitchen where he found Lampied washing glasses.

"Where is that little bandit?" he demanded. "He's hiding somewhere and when I find him——"

"Ah, *monsieur*," wheezed Lampied. "The boy is gone. I was watching. He ran off down the road to the harbor. I always

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said he was a bad rascal, as *monsieur* knows."

"I'll warn the police—" raged Goullier.

"And this will interfere with our little plan, no doubt. It is regrettable—when everything was so nicely arranged—regrettable."

"Nothing is changed. You understand that? Finish the affair tomorrow night. There's no telling, Strachan might go back to Sydney and put an overseer in charge of the work. That would be disastrous. You are not afraid are you?"

"Afraid? Oh, *monsieur!*" Lampied rubbed his wet hands together. "Why, not in the least. If I am of service to Monsieur I am only too pleased to expose myself."

"Don't worry. There's a good alibi all ready for you. It's going to be the easiest thing you have ever had to do. Not a man in Nepuaru will ask questions, and if the consul at Nouméa makes trouble, we'll soon enough find him a culprit."

Lampied's eyes lighted up with ferocious amusement.

"But listen. There's Jérome—we could say——"

"You're not so foolish," admitted Goullier. "Yes, that is quite good. Jérome, of course. A convict's son, just the thing. Make sure you empty Strachan's pockets."

"*Monsieur* can trust me."

Goullier went back to the café where he allowed his customers to drag from him his version of the dispute, and he was careful to say several times——

"That Jérome Larade is up to something. Ungrateful little brute! And crafty! You do not know what I have to contend with, no. I am afraid for Strachan, but of course I could not allow him to stay here. This is a respectable establishment——"

To prove this he condescended to play backgammon with the third bookkeeper of the smelting factory as if nothing had happened, and the "Petit Paris" settled down once again to the noisy business of being gay.

AFTER the first blind panic of headlong flight Jérome found himself halted, panting, in a black gorge where thorny *lantana* bushes tore through his ragged clothes to his skin. He was free, free to listen to the sound of the blood creeping in his ears and the disordered beating of his heart. The heavy stillness was like a gag in his mouth, stifling him.

For two years his days and his nights had gone by to the incessant roll of the stamping mills, an unnoticed undertone as imperceptible as air, as real as Goullier. He was unprepared for its abrupt cessation, which oppressed him, penned him within prison walls of stillness. It became unendurable. He tried to whistle, but the sound came back to him flat and clogged.

Then, breast high in the bushes, his back against a nameless, twisted tree, he tucked his fiddle beneath his chin and played. The terrors vanished, there were stars in the sky and the dawn wind wandering down between the hills brought with it a pleasant smell of damp earth and ferns.

When day came Jérome slept until hunger drove him in search of food. He gorged on pawpaws knocked from a tree with a stick, and drank lying flat on his stomach by the side of a clear brook. He dozed and slept and rested. He grinned to himself as he stretched his tired limbs and felt all atingle with anticipation.

Strachan he dismissed from his mind. Any man who could laugh so vacantly when warned of coming death was either a fool to be so brave, or merely brave because he was a fool. And Martindale could take care of himself; that American was all eyes and no tongue.

The others—well, the others belonged to a nightmare; they were no longer real. Goullier, Lampied—he refused to bother about them. He was going away as soon as he felt strong enough. He would go north to the cattle ranches where he was unknown. The future could take care of itself.

He dallied on the green hillside with all New Caledonia stretching away before him, dallied until the shadows grew long and the sun shot down behind high mountain tops, whose pinacles it edged with gold.

Then it was night and he was groping his way to the top of the ridge hoping to find some known landmark to set his course by. He found more than he had anticipated. At his feet lay Nepuaru and the red, smoky glare of furnaces. Beyond the closepacked roof-tops to his right stood the "Petit Paris," its façade festooned with electric lights which gave it a festive, care-free appearance in comparison with the gray vagueness of the other dwellings. The drone of the mills smote him like a blow in the face.

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He had imagined himself miles away, deep inland, and he was within half an hour's walk of Goullier!

He turned his back on Nepuaru and went stumbling away, anywhere out of sound and sight of the place. Once he came upon a huddled group of coolies gambling beneath a hedge, and their voices followed him eerily as he clawed his way out of the valley. He wandered without purpose or direction, trying to shake off the nameless things that dogged him. Hours later, among tree stumps on a steep declivity, he tried to rest and sleep. Again the oppressive isolation enveloped him and he struggled against an overpowering sense of depression. He found himself, unconsciously, fingering his violin, putting it up to his shoulder.

"Somebody's sure to hear," he told himself, ashamed at his own weakness. "And they'll find me. I mustn't—but perhaps—if I try—very low——"

Thin, quivering and high, the music drifted up into the night. It was little more than a sigh yet the stillness accentuated each note, snatching it, carrying it away as if eager to fill the aching void with sound.

"Going down to the sea," sang the fiddle. "To bless the fishing nets."

It was light and tripping, merry as a *kermesse* in the streets of old Quimper.

Then a cry, mad with horror, rang out, and a voice shrilled:

"Oh, God! No, no. No! Leave me alone! Leave me alone!"

Some one blundered about among the tree stumps, mouthing hysterical oaths.

Jérome stood quite still, frozen, the bow poised in his hand just clear of the strings until another shadow leaped out of nothingness and pulled down the owner of the screaming voice.

He was being hailed—

"Jérome Larade, come here!"

Yes, that was the American calling, that man Martindale.

A light appeared moving swiftly across the broken ground. Another voice—Strachan's—calling from a distance.

Jérome crept forward and blundered at last upon the group—Lampied sprawling on the ground, clutching his throat with both hands; Martindale kneeling beside him, silent, rather austere; Strachan holding an electric torch, trying to obtain information.

"Goullier sent me," choked Lampied. "Yes, I was to stab—through the tent. And now—my heart! I am finished—finished! I heard the warning——"

His teeth chattered.

"I heard——"

He caught sight of Jérome, watching him, motionless.

"You did it!" he called out. "You, oh, you've killed me."

The breath caught in his throat, and he died without shame or reticence, leaving the world with no more decorum than he had shown during a long lifetime.

"And that's that," Martindale said to Strachan when it was all over. "The boy was right and he saved your life in the bargain. That old fellow was so quiet I might have waited out here until morning without knowing he was about."

"Bless us," muttered Strachan. "The idea! I thought you were asleep in the tent."

The hillside seemed to have come to life. From the near-by camp laborers came straggling and Strachan's tent, not twenty yards away, was aglow with light.

Jérome found himself sitting on a stool, drinking coffee and biting into a huge loaf of white bread. Between mouthfuls he talked, and his audience of two listened patiently.

"Blast it!" burst out Strachan. "I'll have Goullier arrested. I'll——"

"What's the time?" asked Martindale. "Twelve? Quite early. I'm going to settle with that fellow right now."

He paused, filling a pipe with deliberation, then went on in a mournful voice:

"Goullier's going to be sorry before long. Look here, Mr. Strachan, suppose I round him up while you get the gendarmes?"

"He's sure to turn the crowd against you. Don't forget——"

"I'm not likely to," sighed Martindale. "Just now I need exercise, I guess. Been lying out there quite some time. Feel kind o' chilly."

"But—single handed! And just last night you wouldn't back me up——"

"Oh, that? Oh, I'm all right now, I think." He turned to Jérome. "Want to come with me? See something very *amusant*. Goullier's no friend of yours."

Strachan protested in vain against the rashness of this new and unexpected Martindale. At last he gave up in disgust with the caution——

"They'll half-kill you and then I'll have

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to bail you out or something—but if you're stubborn go ahead and get hurt."

SO IT happened that forty minutes later Jérome, watching from the shadows by the terrace of the "Petit Paris," saw Martindale walk slowly into the crowded café and pause, blinking, as he looked around for the owner. He did not look terrible. He was long, lank and stooping, and his melancholy face seemed dubious.

Goullier interrupting a game of backgammon, jumped to his feet, shouting——

"You defy me! Out of here! No, you can not come in here!"

"Well," drawled Martindale. "I am in, and when I go out you are coming with me, *avec moi*."

There ensued a small-scale upheaval to the accompaniment of crashing plates and splintering chairs and bursting lamps. The crowd giving tongue to its indignation rushed together forming a compact, squirming mass around Martindale; then instead of crushing him it surprizingly gave way, scattered and fled in disorderly fashion before the American who pursued it armed with a most efficient weapon—a table leg.

His coat and shirt were ripped to tatters, his hair hung down in his eyes, he was a transformed being, a terrible, fascinating creature whose every swift move kept Jérome gaping with astonishment. The roulette table followed the dispersing crowd, the billard table crashed across the veranda and fell onto the road. Within five minutes the work of destruction was complete, the place was cleared, and Goullier with no fight left in him was being driven toward the police station. An insulting mob followed close behind, growling and menacing, but very careful to keep out of striking range.

Jérome, marching at Martindale's side, plucked up courage to ask—

"May I come, *monsieur*?"

"Come?" repeated Martindale, rather flushed and out of breath. "Come where?"

"With you——"

"Want to leave Nepuaru?"

"Oh, if I could——"

They were hurrying along the waterfront and heading toward them were three gendarmes led and urged on by Strachan.

"Well," said Martindale, "I know what we might do. Friend of mine in the Hebrides needs a storekeeper. I don't think he'll bother about your ancestry. I'll take you up there with me. Will that suit you?"

The suddenness of the offer made Jérome check his pace and the violin fell from his hands as he gazed in awe at this worker of marvels. He paused and half-turned to pick up the instrument.

"Come along," ordered Martindale, one eye on Goullier's bent back. "Leave that thing where it is. You won't be needing that reminder. Get a good one next time."

"*Bien, monsieur*," Jérome answered submissively.

And as he stepped off again he was no longer a convict's son on the Nepuaru waterfront, but a man crossing the threshold into a new world.

Behind him the crowd was trampling on the violin which gave out a sharp crackling sound as it fell to pieces.

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A Four-Part Story. Conclusion

THE MYTH-KILLERS

By Hugh Pendexter

Author of "Long Rifles," "Red Autumn," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

I WAS making my way slowly down the Mississippi in the Summer of 1720 when John Law's tales of riches in the new world and his finance schemes had set all France mad with gold-fever. Quite by accident I discovered along the banks an Indian sign which told me that the Natchez were preparing to declare war against the French in the Month of Peaches.

Later when I met Joe Labrador, my loyal friend, I felt no hesitation about continuing although he warned me that Governor de Bienville suspected me of being an English spy. English I certainly was, but the French believed I had been obliged to flee from Virginia and, with the information I had obtained regarding the threatened war I felt that I could convince Monsieur de Bienville of my integrity.

As I approached Biloxi two French trappers joined me, and I was sure from their manner that my name had already been published as a spy. The town was in a turmoil. A ship from France had just landed, filled with settlers and a large number of women destined to become the wives of the Louisiana planters. It mattered little to these men that most of the women were the scourings of Paris. Among them I noticed one girl of such evident refinement that I wondered how she could be a member of this low crew. To my questions she said that her name was Claire Dahlsgaarde and that she was in great distress. Impulsively I offered to help her get to New Orleans although I knew it lessened my own chances of escape.

Monsieur de Bienville approached.

"Monsieur William Brampton," he said formally, "I charge you with being a spy in English employ. While the information you have given me may be correct I am obliged to hold you here until I am assured of your loyalty. You may have the freedom of the town, and I trust you will dine with me tonight."

He bowed again. De Bienville was always a great gentleman.

"How long must I remain?" I questioned, confident that he had no proof.

"Until I hear from my agent, Damoan the Fox, who is now on his way from Virginia," he answered.

My heart sank, for the Fox was the one man to whom I had confided all my plans, believing him to be trustworthy. That night I began making plans to escape, not forgetting *mademoiselle;* her danger for some reason was as great as my own.

TWO fishermen for a heavy bribe helped me to escape, but not until I had had a fight with Damoan the Fox who had just returned to Biloxi. My heart sank for I knew that he would trail me more relentlessly than any Indian.

However, I remembered my promise and managed to pick up *mademoiselle,* and I was greatly relieved when my good friend Joe Labrador promised to accompany us.

The girl refused to realize our danger as we made our way up the Mississippi. One evening as we were cooking supper she permitted herself to stand on the bank clearly outlined, while she called my attention to a canoe across the river.

I feared the worst for, should the party be headed by Damoan, I knew we had little chance of escape. We withdrew to the fire and awaited their coming.

THE canoe contained Monsieur Narbonne, a half-mad Frenchman who had invested his fortune in Mississippi lands and who was now setting out to find the country "where dewdrops turned to diamonds overnight." With him was Six Fingers, an ex-pirate, who had come over on the same ship with *mademoiselle.* For some reason which I could not fathom she was in great fear of the wicked old man, although he now seemed harmless.

I could not desert these two men, ignorant of woodcraft, and so it was agreed that they accompany us.

The first night we were attacked by Indians while in our canoes, and although we beat them off, I

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knew the worst had happened. Damoan the Fox had picked up our trail.

It was necessary to land, and soon after the Fox and his men attacked us again. Hiding *mademoiselle* in a tree, we fought fiercely, but before our escape poor Narbonne was killed.

By now my old friend Labrador joined us again. He too was in flight from Damoan.

We fled on and found refuge in a village of the Tunicas who were friendly. The pipe of peace was smoked. Here, I knew we would be safe for some time. The Fox would hardly dare attack us while under the chief's protection.

Soon after Damoan arrived, and taunted us saying that we were at last trapped.

"Before the Moon of Peaches the smoke must be renewed. I will get you then."

"In a few days you will be a dead man," I told him coldly. But anxiety filled me. Old Six Fingers had made a secret trip outside the stockade. He looked guilty, and I feared he might have made trouble for us.

IT WAS twilight when Damoan returned to the village. He went out of his way to pass within a rod of me, and the look his dark eyes gave me was one of triumph. Yet I could not comprehend any immediate danger. I stood on the law of the tribe, and Strong Bow, even to please Bienville, would not transgress the ancient customs of his people. He was a very old man and under sufficient pressure might be influenced to infringe on the spirit of the law or usage; but nothing would induce him to violate it in the letter. The peace smoke would not blow away without some warning, plus an announcement as to when it could be renewed.

With the going down of the sun the Huma women began running about the village, cackling excitedly. Fires were started in the opening before the chief's cabin. The two women assigned to wait on *mademoiselle* stood in front of the cabin, regretting their charge and wishing themselves with their sisters. Old hags put on airs and imperiously ordered the younger women about. The young women obeyed, laughing secretly at the importance of the ancient dames, laughing openly when the darkness made their offense anonymous. Kettles were hung over the fires and the various kinds of game were dumped in, the contributions ranging from squirrels and waterfowl to deer-meat. Damoan kept to the other side of the village and had his Choctaws posted about the exit. He believed he had us bottled up until the protection of the calumet had ended.

When it grew so dark there was no danger of being closely observed I walked to the girl's cabin, and was pleased to find the Indian women had succumbed to the temptation of the twinkling fires and had left *mademoiselle* unattended. She came forth at my call, one hand to the bosom of her blouse. Seeing it was me she dropped her hand to her side, and I instructed her—

"After I have gone back I want you to steal behind the cabin and see if the hole is there as Six Fingers described."

"It is there. I saw him when he came through it. The two women were in front, watching the other women, and no one noticed him but me."

"Then be ready for Labrador to call for you. When he comes you must act swiftly. Do as he says."

"The other?"

"I've told you he stays with me. He is acting queer. He's been up to some mischief. He may have bargained to sell us out."

To my astonishment she instantly denied this possibility, declaring:

"He would never sell me. No, no, *monsieur*. He is evil, but he wants me to escape from this village and from the man you call the Fox."

More of the mystery! I made no comment, but repeated my request that she be in constant readiness to go with Labrador. Then I wished her a stout heart and good luck.

She came to me and took one hand in both of hers and held it to her heart, and without a word retreated inside the cabin. I began to realize how horrible the whole situation must be for her. She was denied the tonic of action and must dully wait, always fearing the worst. I vowed that did I escape and overtake her I would be less captious when she indulged in her whims and swift changes of mood. I was back at my cabin in time to meet Little Turkey and six warriors, who, as an escort of honor, came to lead Labrador, Six Fingers and me to the feast. As we walked between them and entered the firelight I beheld the chief's grandson and a delegation of warriors performing the same courtesy for Damoan the Fox. Behind Damoan came all of his Choctaws except four left to guard the exit.

Strong Bow appeared as we took our places on mats made of split canes and the pipe was passed up and down the double

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row, each taking a puff, a ceremonious preliminary to the feasting and having none of the significance of the peace smoke. After the smoking was finished Strong Bow made a speech, dwelling on the Humas' love for the French, and declaring that his people were heart-brothers of all the white people in the village. Damoan, sitting opposite me, smiled sardonically at this passage in the chief's talk. After the speech—which was very brief for an Indian to make—was finished, and after all had remained silent and motionless for a minute, Damoan stood up and told the Humas how highly they stood in the love of Iron Hand.

"My master," he said in this connection, as an adroit reminder that Bienville could be inexorable in carrying out his purpose, "also loves the Natchez. Yet once he had to take the heads of Chief of the Beard and other chiefs because they did not give into his hands those of their people who had offended him. But my master never has had to ask for a Huma head; for they always have been friends to the French ever since they met the great Tonti.

"My red brothers now have with them a white man, who is not French. He is *Mikilish hatak*—an Englishman— Foolish birds have whispered to this man that I am his enemy. I am the servant of Iron Hand. Iron Hand wants this man to come down the river and talk with him. I am here to take him down the river, also to take the white woman. But there is a peace smoke over the village, and so long as the two refuse to go I must wait for the smoke to lift. Iron Hand is a just man, but he grows impatient. He sends his greetings to the Humas through me, his word-bearer. After he has talked with this white man and white woman in Biloxi he will send many presents to this village."

The promise of presents caused the savages' eyes to glitter with avarice, just as the mention of Bienville's punishment of the Natchez chiefs four years before had caused their eyes to drop in fear. Strong Bow was nervous, although his aged face betrayed no signs. After a decent interval he rose and said the peace smoke was an ancient custom, and that the Humas would be destroyed by wicked spirits if they ever broke the peace of the pipe. But, he added, it was never expected that the same peace smoke could always remain in the village, as strong winds were sure to blow it away. Peace by the calumet must be renewed, just as peace by belts was renewed. The belts being heavier than the smoke would hold their peace longer without renewal. In the matter of *Mikilish hatak* the smoke over him would last for two sleeps. Then there would be another feast, *after which*, the smoke would be renewed.

"That is when I shall bag you," murmured Damoan in English as the chief sat down.

I rose and told the chief how the English loved him, even as did the French, and that his words were good and wise and laid down a smooth, white road for all white men to travel when they would visit the Humas with presents. I applauded the wisdom of renewing the smoke, and reminded him that the smoke over Damoan was growing thin and must be strengthened at the end of two days, after the big feast. And that being done, I would go with him downstream, as would the white woman, to talk with Iron Hand. And as I seated myself I whispered to him in English—

"And that is when I shall get you, you skunk."

He grinned and shrugged his shoulders, and the chief gave the sign for the feasting to begin. Minute portions were tossed over the shoulders for the ghosts, and the peace calumet was hung up on a pole by the side of the chief and was made the recipient of scraps of meat and rations of beans. Strong Bow looked up and down the double line of men, bolting the meat like dogs, and asked me why the white woman was not standing among the Indian women to watch the feast. I told him she was a queen in her own country and not used to standing while men ate, and that she preferred remaining in her cabin until the dancing began, when she would appear. Damoan grinned widely and murmured—

"She shall stand while I eat, my friend."

I pretended not to hear, and Damoan stared at me curiously, trying to fathom my mind. Like the fox he feared a trap, but so long as I and my male companions were within immediate reach he could not reason out where we had a single chance. Six Fingers never raised his eyes from his food, and yet he was not hungry. Labrador devoured huge portions of underdone meat with the philosophy of one who makes the most of the hour which is his. In a short space of time the kettles were emptied except what was reserved for the women, and

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the warriors retired to paint for their dance. I called to Labrador in French and requested him to wait on *mademoiselle* and ask her to come and see the dancing. He rose, and Six Fingers nudged me slyly.

I gave him no heed and from the corner of his mouth he whispered—

"Ain't it time to make sail?"

"Not yet," I answered under my breath, afraid that Damoan's quick wit would put him on his guard. That he was suspicious was shown by his low-voiced order to his Choctaws, two of whom reluctantly left the fire and made off to the exit. I had feared he was sending them to tag after Labrador, and my heart had doubled its tune. That he might not see the relief I felt I turned my head aside. He demanded my attention by asking—

"So we renew the peace smoke in two sleeps, eh?"

There was so much exultation in his tone, so much *diablerie* in his grinning face, that I knew he was up to some new trick, something I had not dreamed of. I guessed frantically and could not imagine what it was; yet I knew he had his plans all laid before the feast began, and that he was not dependent upon the interval between the end of the first smoke and the beginning of the second.

"Much may happen in two days," I carelessly replied.

"As true as heaven," he mocked. "And much may happen in one day—before another sun."

"What are you planning to try tonight?" I bluntly asked.

He laughed merrily, and protested:

"I try? *Pardieu!* Think I would break the law of the Humas? But if you should break it, eh? Come now; would the peace smoke hover over your English head for two days if it was known that you had broken the law?"

There was no guessing his meaning, although he meant death. I scoured my brains, but could find no signs which would lead me to his hidden trail. Surely I was not to be betrayed into any violence and lose the protection of the pipe. No; it was nothing like that. The anticipation dancing in his eyes bespoke something already prepared, something which only awaited a a climax such as my demise. I was still pondering on this new attitude of his when the freshly-painted warriors, armed with axes and bows and arrows, leaped in between the fires and began their war-dance. The spectacle appealed to the savage in Damoan, and his face lighted up as if he would have enjoyed stripping to the buff and taking his place in the stamping circle. As the dancers withdrew to begin a fresh maneuver Damoan suddenly turned his head, as one just awakened, and fiercely demanded—

"Where is my woman?"

I eased my ire by reminding him—

"Your scalp shall pay the whole price."

He leaped to his feet and spoke to the chief's grandson, who was reluctant to do what was asked. Damoan then spoke to me, saying—

"If the woman does not come the Humas will bring her."

As Labrador and the girl had had time to get far down the river-trail I knew this would be some task for the Humas to accomplish. Yet I fought for more time by appealing to the chief's sense of justice, urging him to declare the white woman need not show herself at all unless she so desired.

I had made him a present and Damoan had not. English traders occasionally stole into his territory, and their trade-goods were both superior and cheaper than the French stock, and their rum was as potent as the best French brandy. Only the fear of Bienville caused him to hesitate. He would hunt with the French and run with the English; and he suggested—

"It would make the hearts of the Humas very light if the white woman would come and watch them dance."

"So be it," I said. "I will go and ask her. My friend is having a hard time to bring her."

I do not believe Damoan would have suspected any ruse had it not been for Six Fingers' frantic haste to follow at my heels.

"Let them stay here!" shouted the Fox. "The Iron Hand will fall and crush the Humas if they do not stay here. Send your grandson, or any warrior, to tell the woman to come."

"Stop, *Mikilish hattak!*" cried the chief, now in panic at the threat of the Fox, word-bearer of Bienville. "The eyes of the Humas would be made glad at sight of the white woman. I, Strong Bow, chief of the Humas, will go and ask her to come."

Our loud talk had brought the dancing

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warriors around us, excited and curious to know the new sport about to be unfolded. Damoan chuckled contentedly, and he said to the chief:

"We will wait a moment. There is a present the white man has prepared for his woman. He had it hid in the woods but my Choctaws found it. We will have it ready when she comes to see the dance."

He whistled shrilly, and very soon two Choctaws came trotting from the exit with a long object carried between them. It was closely muffled in blankets and for the life of me I could not foresee what was to happen.

As the object was carefully deposited on the ground I noticed the blanket was one of those taken from Narbonne's pirogue by Six Fingers when we came ashore to hide in the Indian village. I was positive it had gone into our cabin with the other blankets; and now it was being brought in from the outside with something in it.

"Veer off. ——'s to pay!" choked Six Fingers.

"Some of your cursed treachery?" I muttered, stepping forward as if to get a better view of the object on the ground, but in reality to gain a position opposite the weakest point in the circle, which happened to be that nearest my cabin.

"It was hid at the brook! The cursed scum found it!" huskily whispered Six Fingers, his deep set eyes glaring at the two Choctaws as they took hold of the blanket. "There's a black spot on my luck!"

Damoan motioned his Indians back, and because of his love of the dramatic assumed full charge of the proceedings. Striking an attitude and pointing a finger at me he harshly cried out to the bewildered Humas—

"The present of ***Mikilish hattak*** to his woman!"

And he snatched a fold of the blanket away and revealed to our horrified gaze the body of a dead Huma woman. And what was more terrible she had died by violence and her two arms had been cut off below the elbow. We were stupified by the fearful exhibit; then with the hiss of a thousand serpents came the breath of the Humas. Damoan had opened a smaller parcel and was exposing the two severed members of the poor creature, still decorated with their bracelets of brass.

"You frog-eating fool!" madly shrieked Six Fingers at Damoan. "They are gold and you could have had half if you'd kept your meat-trap shut!"

His outburst broke the spell. With insane howls the Humas crowded in from all sides. I leaped toward the point I had selected when the circle first formed, and bowled over two men and was running toward my cabin where I had left my musket. With the squeal of a cornered rat the murderer attempted to follow me; and he must have used his knife to some profit, for I heard a death howl. Damoan was yelling for his Choctaws to chase me, but the bulk of them were back at the exit and the others were tardy in taking up the pursuit.

As for the Humas they paused to tie Six Fingers' hands behind his back. By the time they were pounding after me I had secured my musket and was at the patch of vines behind the girl's cabin. While the entire mass of infuriated savages were sweeping down on my cabin I risked calling the girl's name. The silence and the failure of Labrador to make an appearance satisfied me they were well on their way to the river. I cautiously worked in behind the vines and found the hole, scarcely large enough for my bulk to pass through.

Thrusting my feet through I was clear except my shoulders when the wild mob passed the cabin and surrounded the one I had occupied. The women had snatched burning brands from the fires, and these illuminated the scene. Through the mesh of vines I saw Six Fingers being dragged between two warrirors; and as the savages came to a halt I heard him scream:

"Good lack! This will be death!"

Pirate and murderer that he was I could not help the wish that he might find a quick death, rather than to roast slowly on the elevated bed of torture. Utterly bad as he was he was born an Englishman, and if it had not been for narrowing the girl's chances of escape I should have been tempted to shoot him because once he had been an English lad.

The chief's grandson, bolder than the others, ran forward with ax and torch and thrust his head inside the cabin. Turning back he shouted that I was gone. Almost the same moment Damoan ran into the cabin in front of me and yelled to the red men that Labrador and the woman were gone. When he appeared in the torch-light

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he was insane with rage, and catching a glimpse of Six Fingers' writhing figure he screeched like a panther and fell upon him as if intending to tear him to pieces with his bare hands.

"I can tell their plans!" screamed Six Fingers in English as Damoan's fingers began ripping his face.

"Tell them! Tell them! Or I'll pick you joint from joint!" howled Damoan, bending over the craven, his outstretched hands hooked like claws.

"Save me! Save me!" gasped Six Fingers. "Take me with you I'll lead you to them!"

"Speak!" yelled Damoan, hunching his shoulders and wriggling his long fingers before the murderer's bleeding face.

"They planned for Labrador and the woman to get away while we was eating!" panted Six Fingers. "They planned——"

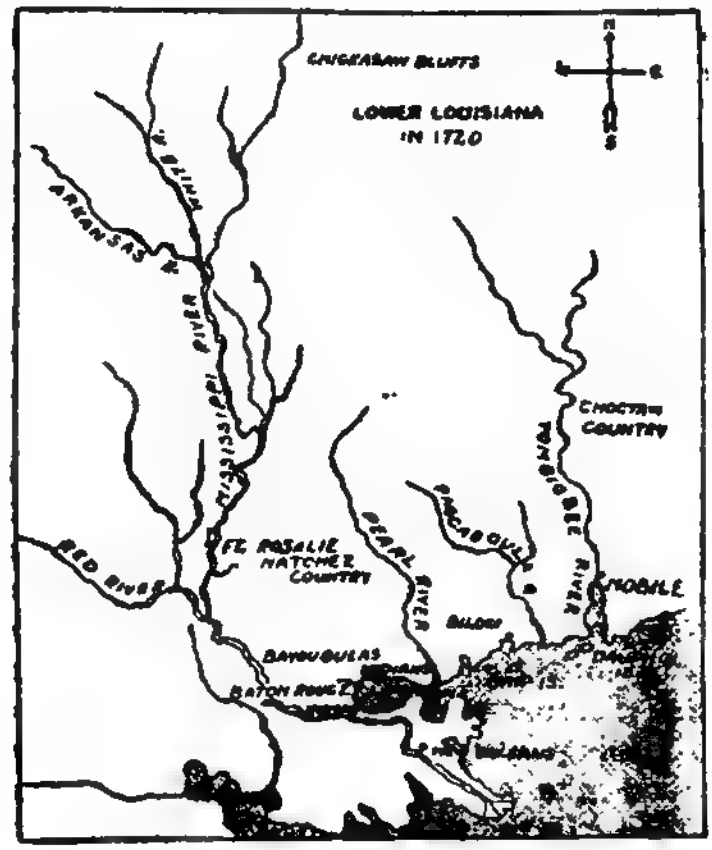
But now it was purely a question of the girl's safety and not of this snake's suffering; and I fired an ounce ball through his wicked skull, and slipped through the hole and away into the black forest.

CHAPTER XII

THE PROUD ONE'S SISTER DIES

I LED the chase that night toward the east; and so long as I traveled in that direction I took pains occasionally to betray my position. This procedure gave the girl and Labrador more time to escape, for I knew Damoan would bend every endeavor to overtake me. Toward morning I swung back in a wide circle, planning to strike the Mississippi near the Tunica village at the upper end of the Portage of the Cross. There I was sure to find a canoe in which to push on after my friends.

That night I skirted the Tunica village and stole some corn from an outlying village and was fortunate enough to find a small canoe containing a fish-net made of linden-bark fiber and some lines equipped with hooks of fish-bone. I made excellent progress that night, nor did I observe anything to indicate my foes had discovered my return to the river. Damoan would expect me to follow after the girl and, appreciating my woodcraft, could easily assume I had planned to escape overland to Pearl River. Unhampered by a woman that journey would have been simple enough. I finished the night and went ashore and slept for the greater part of the day, and was back on the water without detecting any sign of Damoan and the Choctaws. As for the Humas I did not believe they would seek me outside their own territory, as they could safely leave my punishment to the Fox. It was not until I had passed the mouth of the Tunica River—also known as the River of the Innocents—that I found what I was positive was a trace of *mademoiselle* and Labrador.



It was a small bark shelter in a secluded spot well back from the river, just such a shelter as I had built for her each night we were in the open. I landed that night at the foot of Devil's Channel and caught some fish and killed a turkey, thus dining regally. It was at that camp that I received a fine fright. I had eaten ravenously and was down in the canoe and fighting the temptation to risk a pipe of tobacco when, without any warning, a small dugout shot in close beside me. There was but one Indian in it, and whether he was one of Damoan's Choctaws, or from one of the river-tribes, it was too dark for me to determine. Whoever he might be I did not care to be recognized as a white man.

Although very close he had not discovered me, and acting more on impulse than any settled plan I took the fish-net from the bottom of the pirogue and threw it over his head and shoulders. The frightened —— let out a yell that threatened to carry to the

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Gulf, and back-paddled as if Satan in person was after his scalp-lock. As he vanished into the river mists I collected my blankets and food and worked half-way through the channel before daring to seek rest.

The next day I pushed ahead rapidly, confident Damoan could not overtake me. He would be tardy in returning to the river, for he first must satisfy himself I had abandoned the eastern course. Once on the river he would make slower time than I as he would be searching the eastern bank for signs of me, and he might even suspect I had planned a rendezvous with Labrador and the girl somewhere up the Red river. Working fast, but always well within my strength, I finally passed through the southernmost of the Three Channels and in due time reached a deserted Tiou village. There I found more traces of my friends; such as the tiny bark shelter, and—I retained this—a piece of fringe torn from *mademoiselle's* leggings.

It was not until I reached the Cliffs of Natchez and was reconnoitering the mouth of Little river that I made two important discoveries—one brought great joy, the other impelled me to paddle with desperate haste into the tributary. Ahead of me, some distance up Little river, was a pirogue containing two persons. One of the couple looked like a boy and was not using a paddle. In the next moment I had glimpsed a long pirogue turning a bend of the big river below me. It held at least a dozen Indians and their six-foot paddles were flashing rapidly. I did not believe I had been seen as I was disappearing into the tributary when this strange craft showed its nose around the bend.

The canoe ahead now discovered me and the slim figure vanished by dropping flat, and the other abandoned the paddle to pick up a musket. I waved my cap and Labrador turned about and began paddling to meet me. I violently gestured for him to go back, and in pantomime announced the peril behind me. As he swung his pirogue about to head up-stream again he must have told the girl, for she reappeared and stretched out both hands to me.

We were within three miles of White Apple, the principal town of the Natchez which in turn was within three miles of Fort Rosalie. Let us but get inside the village and I would have no fear of either the French at the fort, or of Damoan and the Choctaws pursuing me. The Natchez were on the eve of war with the French. They were a very haughty people; there would be no subtle evasion of their laws to please Bienville even if the red Warrior's Post did not stand between them. The three of us would have full measure of protection from the Great Sun and his brother and war-chief, Tattooed Serpent. So my heart was light when I drew up alongside Labrador's pirogue and was greeted by his amiable grin and a tremulous handclasp from the girl.

"We must hide the canoes and go overland to the village on the creek," I announced to Labrador. "Do not be alarmed, *mademoiselle,* but Damoan and some Indians are coming up the river."

"Ah, that Damoan!" said Labrador admiringly.

"They will overtake us?" she asked.

"No. They dare not enter the Natchez village. Damoan's audacity even isn't equal to that; and his Choctaws are the ancient enemies of the Chickasaws, who are now the allies of the Natchez."

For the first time both seemed to note the absence of Six Fingers, and both began asking questions.

"He was shot and killed while escaping from the village," I said. "If he had obeyed orders he could have escaped with me."

The girl's face was sober at hearing such violent news, and yet I fancied there was relief in her bearing. Labrador knew there was something interesting behind my brief announcement, but wisely waited until we could be alone before seeking the details. We dragged the canoes under some bushes, and, being in familiar country, took the shortest cut to White Apple—sometimes called White Earth.

WHEN we had all but come to the village we heard a peculiar howl, which startled Labrador and me because we knew what it meant, and which frightened the girl because she could imagine it to mean almost anything unwholesome. The howl was repeated, and the sound of many feet falling in unison caused the girl to draw close to me. I motioned for Labrador to make a détour, but before we knew it we were through the bushes and in an opening close to the village, and the girl was staring with wide eyes at the strange scene. Some of the Natchez were rehearsing for a

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funeral ceremony. I whispered as much to her, and she became quiet and curiously watched the peculiar proceedings. The Indians did not appear to have seen us, although we were within plain view of them. Had *mademoiselle* fully understood what the ceremony portended she would have been less composed.

There were three women and two men who were to be the central figures in the funeral tragedy. Each of these was accompanied by eight men of the lower class. These men were to act as executioners and because of that grim service would be elevated automatically to the rank of nobles. One of each squad carried an ax, painted red, and at frequent intervals made as if to strike a victim. Another carried a split-cane mat on which the victim would sit. Then came the man with the deerskin, which would be thrown over the head of the victim. And another carried the rope to be used in strangling the victim, with four men to pull on each end. The last of each eight was the bearer of the bowl, which held the big tobacco-pills. These pills were intended to lull the victims into indifference.

There were five victims and forty executioners, the grim office being eagerly sought because it ennobled. All the executioners had their hands painted red and had red feathers thrust through the long braids of hair hanging down the left side of the head. The five victims had their hair painted red. The girl saw no significance in the red hands, the red hair, the rope and red ax, but the gestures of the man with the weapon frightened her.

"It is all make-believe," I whispered, trying to hurry her on.

"Ah, the droll creatures," smiled Labrador.

But she was fascinated and made but slow progress. She saw the procession halt and the victims take their places on the mats and prance about in the death-dance, while the red-handed ones did likewise in a big circle. Then all united in the death cry.

"It is better she does not know," said Labrador in Choctaw.

"We will go to the village. If Damoan did not see me enter the river he will learn from the fort that none of us have passed."

So we walked toward the village, and, the rehearsal being finished, the Natchez came after us. But such was their courtesy that they would not pass us; and those who desired to reach the village quickly swung far to one side as if taking an entirely different course.

Labrador was frowning heavily and in Choctaw said—

"Friend; there was no word-bearer, nor any medicine-man among those to be sacrificed."

I had noticed this much. He continued:

"And there were no wives. The women were very old."

"And still it was a noble who died," I said.

"And there being no word-bearer, nor medicine-man, nor wives, the dead must be a woman. The three old women were her kinswomen. The two men were her servants. If it was La Glorieuse there would be many more servants."

He named a woman of noble rank, called "The Proud" by the French because of her aristocratic bearing, her contempt for commoners, and her ignorement of any Frenchman unless he possess rank. I had met La Glorieuse several times, but she felt so high above a wandering Englishman that she scarcely acknowledged my existence. It was known that Tattooed Serpent was enamoured of her, but both being nobles marriage between them was impossible. No; the funeral procession was scarcely worthy of a woman who enjoyed the favor of Olabalkebiche, head war-chief, as well as a brother of the Great Sun.

"It is not La Glorieuse," I said.

Labrador sighed.

"Ah, that *grande dame!* Why couldn't it be her!"

"That is queer talk," I rebuked. "How has the Proud One ever harmed you?"

He shrugged his shoulders and smiled ruefully, and answered:

"It is I who harmed her—as she thinks. And she is very powerful because of the Serpent's love for her. I married her sister. She never forgave her sister for marrying beneath her. Never forgave me for looking so high! *Mon Dieu!* Such a pride! Ah, that Proud One! Louis the Fourteenth would not have been too exalted for her!"

Mademoiselle sharply reminded us—

"Either you are discourteous, or you have much to say which you do not wish me to understand."

"Only our forest habit," I protested. "We speak the Indian tongues unconsciously."

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And Labrador earnestly lied:

"*Mademoiselle*, for me I did not know I was talking a red tongue. *Ma foi!* One talks all sorts out here."

We entered the village, a collection of square huts made of timbers plastered with mud, moss and sand, with the roofs of reeds and grass, woven so as to be weather-proof. Those occupied by the nobility were thirty feet square; those of the lower class were only half as large.

The Natchez were much diffetent from any Indian tribe I ever encountered, or heard of. The Great Sun had absolute say as to the life and property of his subjects, a degree of autocratic power not even recorded of the ancient Powhatans in Virginia. The practise of human sacrifices on the death of the elect smacked of ancient eastern civilizations; and the worship of the sun reminded one of the stories brought back from Central and South America. And yet their language was linked up with the dialects of the Choctaws, Chickasaws and Creeks.

They claimed to have come from Mexico and to have had more than half a thousand members in the royal family—Little Suns, they called them—when they first settled along the Mississippi. I believe their decrease in numbers is largely due to lung sicknesses and smallpox, rather than to their practise of sacrificing the living to the dead. This seems to be self-evident, inasmuch as they have followed the gruesome custom from the beginning of their history, and yet were strong and powerful when they migrated to the East.

The village was seemingly empty. As if our coming was a signal a death-howl rang out from one of the first cabins passed, and this was caught up and repeated from the other cabins. The girl was startled by the first piercing *yowl*, but Labrador and I were quick to reassure her. Those of the natives we met courteously drew aside to allow us to pass. There was an entire absence of that crowding and jostling which is found among the more northern tribes, and which is marked by rudeness and even pilfering from the person among the Mackinac savages. In truth, I always held the Natchez had but little to learn from the punctilious French, against whom they were now planning war.

I accosted an *ancient* warrior—so called to distinguish him from *young* warriors and *apprentice* warriors, and referring to skill rather than to age—and asked if I could secure an audience with the Great Sun. He told me the Great Sun was absent inspecting the temple and sacred fire in a neighboring village. He believed I could see Tattooed Serpent, however. As we passed the temple we halted for *mademoiselle* to view it. It was built on an eight-foot mound and towered above the other structures. It was thirty feet square and faced the east. It was divided into two rooms, in the larger of which burned the sacred fire which was supposed never to go out.

Through an opening we glimpsed some of the eight attendants dragging eight-inch logs of white walnut to the fire. I explained to *mademoiselle* how the war-bundle was kept in the temple and how one stick was taken from the bundle each day and burned, and that when the last stick was burned the Natchez would take the war-path.

I also told her how among the Chickasaw towns similar bundles were being depleted at the rate of one stick a day. But I did not tell her that if the altar attendant should allow the fire to go out it would mean his death and some great calamity to the tribe. Nor did I mention that the bones of the preceding Great Sun rested in a basket of reeds close to the altar. None of the commoners were allowed to enter the temple.

The year before I had been permitted to enter the altar-room by the Great Sun, who was the high priest, of the temple. In another and smaller room were certain objects which were worshiped by the nobles and never seen by white men. On the top of the temple sat three huge wooden birds, painted white and dotted with red; and the wooden eyes of these stared into the east.

Now I had expected that the girl would find the quiet and orderliness of the village to be a welcome relief from the more savage conditions we had noticed when among the Humas. To the contrary she confessed to me a horrible apprehension of dangers which she could not name. She found something subtly menacing in the temple with its three hideous bird guardians. The prevailing color tone of red also increased her fears. So plain was her emotion that I did not care to present her to Tattooed Serpent. I told Labrador to take her to the edge of the village and wait while I paid our respects to my old acquaintance, the war-chief. She was glad to do this; nor did Labrador regret

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escaping an audience with the great chief, whose mistress' sister he had married and deserted.

"You will hurry back to tell me what he says about my being here," said Labrador in Choctaw.

"*Ciel!* More of that mystery language," complained the girl.

"Pardon, many times, *mademoiselle.* I forgot," humble said Labrador. "I was saying in the red tongue, 'Ah, those queer birds on the temple roof.'"

I have no idea she believed him, but leaving them I went to the cabin next to the temple and informed an aged man, the Serpent's word-bearer, that I wished to see the chief. He disappeared through the low doorway and very soon returned and motioned for me to enter.

As the door furnished the only light, and as the room was thirty feet square I could not make out the interior until the sun-glare left my eyes. Then I saw the Serpent and La Glorieuse, "The Proud." As is characteristic of all Indian tribes I have any knowledge of the Natchez women were much inferior in appearance to the men. La Glorieuse was vastly superior to her countrymen. She was above the medium height and gracefully slender. The hem of her fiber skirt was decorated with painted glass beads and the close fitting, armless leather garment, much like a waistcoat accentuated the perfection of her figure. She had not followed the usual custom of wearing ornaments in the ears and nose, and her features were regular and their hauteur had inspired her French name. As I entered she swept by me with barely a flicker of recognition in her cold face. Olabalkebiche came forward and cordially greeted me, finding me a stool while he seated himself on the edge of his bed. He was a big man, fully as large as I, and of perfect physique. He clapped his hands, and a servant brought a pipe, which the chief lighted for me to smoke ceremoniously. After he had done likewise he said:

"The Proud One is grieving for the dead woman. She would have destroyed herself to do the woman honor. I had much work to change her mind. Only that she may live to follow me to death has stopped her painting her hair red."*

"Surely she would be mad to paint her hair for a woman when she can, if she lives, be painted for your burial," I said.

The Indian male's feeling of superiority over his women deprived this speech of flattery, and he nodded in a matter-of-fact way, and said:

"The dead woman was the Proud One's sister. But the Proud One had promised to wait for me."

Had the wild war-whoop of the Choctaws filled the cabin I could not have been taken more by surprize. Then came dismay. Outside was La Glorieuse, who had been demeaned when her sister had married a titleless Frenchman; and outside was simple Joe Labrador and the dainty French girl. What a clash of eyes there would be should red meet white, and the red behold her dead sister's careless spouse daring to return to White Apple in company with a white woman.

"It is many moons since the White Indian was here," the Serpent remarked, eying me sharply.

"Olabalkebiche, I should have waited until I could bring gifts for the Great Sun and his brother, but Choctaw dogs have chased me up the river, and I come here to be among friends."

"The Choctaws hunt so far as this?" he cried, his hand closing on a big war-ax, a gift from the French.

"The man known as Damoan the Fox leads them," I replied.

His hand on the ax slowly relaxed its nervous grip, and he frowned heavily.

"The Great Sun is angry with the French," he said. "There is a cloud between them. There was a time when Damoan was welcome here."

"He may come now."

The Serpent shook his head and lifted a hand and pointed toward the temple, and said:

"In there, near the sacred fire that never dies, is a bundle of war-sticks. It was a very large bundle when first placed there. Now it has grown very small. We burn one stick every day. All the Natchez villages do the same. In the Chickasaw towns a stick is burned every day. There will soon come the day when the last stick is burned; and then we shall strike the ax into the heads of the French."

But his heart was not in his words. There was no gusto in his speech, no impatience to be about the red work. He was the

*La Glorieuse was a willing victim at the burial of Tattooed Serpent in 1725.

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war-chief, but this was his brother's war. Recovering his composure he kindly told me:

"The whole Choctaw nation can not harm you here. My white brother is safe."

"There is a white woman with me, neither English nor French, but kin to the English. I am taking her to the English towns far in the east, beyond the country of the Cherokees."

"It is well," he said absent-mindedly. "She will be safe here."

Now came the hardest portion of my task, and I wished I had had it over with at the beginning. I said:

"And there is a white man with me, a Frenchman, but my brother. He is Labrador."

The Serpent's form elongated although he did not move from the bed, and his head swung back and forth nervously. His hand rested on the handle of his ax and once more he was clutching it nervously.

"Your friend took a Natchez woman as his wife," he softly informed me.

"So he told me."

"That woman is dead."

"He will be heavy of heart to learn it."

"He must prove himself worthy of mating with a noble, a sister of the Proud One."

"Undoubtedly," I promptly assured him, frantic to get outside and have a talk with Labrador and agree upon some plan for immediate flight. "When is the woman to be buried?"

"Tomorrow."

"I will go and tell my friend so he will not wander away."

"He will not wander away."

I managed to close the interview without sacrificing ceremony and politeness and hastened to find my friends. When I came to the edge of the village my roving gaze halted on a dramatic scene. Labrador sat on a log tearing at his long hair while La Glorieuse and *mademoiselle* faced each other, both declaiming in French.

I heard La Glorieuse jeering—

"He was unworthy to marry a Natchez woman; yet you take him for a husband."

"He is not my husband!" cried *mademoiselle*. "What are his marriages to *sauvages* to me? Do you not know how to speak to your betters, woman?"

"I do not mate with runaway Frenchmen!" snarled La Glorieuse, working her long fingers as a pantheress might exercise her claws.

"*Mon Dieu!* What a terrible creature you are! Why do you talk to me? I would be alone. Have you no corn to pound; no man's work to do?"

"You will soon be alone so far as this French runaway is to be counted," hissed the Proud One, throwing up her head and stalking away with the glass beads on her bark skirt tinkling metallically at every step.

I stepped forward. Labrador groaned:

"*Hélas!* These Natchez!"

"You know who is to be buried tomorrow?" I asked him in Choctaw.

"The furious one has told me. *Mon Dieu!* She says they wait for me to paint my hair and be strangled by four men at each end of the rope!"

"Speak in French, and be careful," I warned, observing that *mademoiselle* was about to break bounds, her taste for battle whetted by her talk with the Natchez woman. In French I remarked:

"There is to be a funeral tomorrow. I think we better start away before then."

"Give me that painted hussy in France and I would have her whipped," stormed *mademoiselle*.

"Ah, that Proud One!" groaned Labrador.

"Does the Serpent want to see me?"

"Not yet. Let us go aside and talk it over."

WE SHIFTED our position to the shade of some pines. The Natchez were watching us furtively. They had witnessed the scene between the two women, and they were curious of course. Their etiquette, however, kept them from intruding as we went into the shade to hold a council. They also knew that Labrador's return was likely to lend new interest to the funeral and to provide noble rank for eight more of the lower order. As the husband of the dead woman my friend, from the Natchez viewpoint, was duty-bound to offer himself a willing sacrifice. I felt no concern for my personal safety; not did the matter of the girl's escape press for my immediate attention. Labrador's predicament, however, demanded prompt action.

In Choctaw I told him—

"They do not intend that you shall escape."

Before he could reply the girl passionately broke in with:

"If I am to be treated as a child I will

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withdraw. I was taught it was not courteous to converse in an unknown tongue before a friend."

Labrador stared at me helplessly. Taking a sudden resolve I told her:

"You speak with much sense. You are not a child. I will not keep it from you. The ancient custom of the Natchez demands that when a noble dies the surviving husband or wife shall die during the funeral ceremony. Our friend was the husband of the woman who is to be buried tomorrow. He has not seen her for some time. He did not know she was dead when he came here with us. The dead woman was the sister of La Glorieuse, the woman you had words with."

"*Ciel!* What a horrible people! I felt it in the air. That procession of painted men and women! *Mon Dieu!* Is there no place where people are free and happy and good? And poor Monsieur Labrador! Behold the forest, *monsieur*. Fly! Hide yourself! Now! *Voilà tout!*"

And she stamped a small moccasin imperiously and gestured for him to run.

"There are hundreds of eyes watching us, *mademoiselle*," he humbly explained. "And the natives are swift of foot and bend strong bows."

"Do you mean you will remain here like an ox?" she angrily demanded. "What is the matter with you? I command you to go at once."

He was speechless and begged my assistance with a roll of his brown eyes.

"*Mademoiselle* forgets it would be hard for our friend to hide from the savages except in the night. We must plan cunningly and not be impatient," I told her.

She dropped on the carpet of brown needles and clinched her hands in her lap and stared at the toes of her tiny moccasins. I feared she was sinking beneath what she might feel to be the inevitable. To rescue her from her forlorn mood I encouraged her.

"There is plenty of time. Perhaps sometime during the day. If not, then during the night. There is no danger for you, or me."

"I was thinking only of him," she dully replied.

Labrador wriggled convulsively, and muttered:

"Pouf! It is as nothing. I am not worthy a thought. By and by I shall walk away. *Mademoiselle* will be so good as to forget me."

Our conference was not leading us anywhere except into despondency, and I was relieved to witness a bustling activity down the creek, where a group of Natchez men seemed vitally interested in something. One of them hastened toward the temple, and I recognized him as Tattooed Serpent's word-bearer. A stranger had arrived at the outskirts of the village, but he was hemmed in from my sight by the circle of Natchez. After awhile the word-bearer came trotting back and made an announcement. Immediately the group of Natchez men parted and I was gazing at the grandson of Strong Bow, the Huma chief. The young Huma carried a long calumet, which was decorated with the feathers of a white eagle, making it a pipe of peace. The word-bearer took the pipe from him and started with it toward the cabin of the Serpent. At that moment La Glorieuse came on the scene, barbaric and insolent, and with a glance read the situation. The Humas, allies of both the French and the Gulf Choctaws, were sending a peace pipe to the Natchez. The woman questioned the Huma rapidly; then swiftly ran after the aged word-bearer.

I glanced at Labrador. He was watching the scene through narrowed lids. He understood all the dramatic possibilities attending the presentation of the peace-pipe. Personally I was wondering if Strong Bow was asking that I be returned to him because of Six Fingers' murder of one of the Huma women. *Mademoiselle* wrinkled her brows when gazing at the Huma, thinking she had seen him before, perhaps. But he was grotesquely painted with white clay, to symbolize his tribe's desire for a strong and lasting peace, and, as furthermore all Indians looked much alike to her, she did not recognize him. Nor did he turn his gaze in our direction that I could observe, although I knew he had studied us keenly. Both Labrador and I were considering the same questions: Where was Damoan? What pipe would Tattooed Serpent return.

"Can't we go away from here—do something?" asked the girl.

"Patience for a moment, *mademoiselle*," I soothed.

The minutes passed and I wondered what part La Glorieuse was playing in the drama inside the war-chief's cabin. Suddenly I realized I was doing wrong to remain aloof when I knew her influence would be hostile to me and Labrador. With a few hurried

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words to my friends I rose and made for the Serpent's cabin. As I reached the door the word-bearer came out, importantly holding before him a Natchez white pipe. Behind him walked the woman, her dark face lively with triumph. I had hoped the Serpent would return a pipe ablaze with flamingo feathers.

I ignored the woman and stood in the doorway. The Serpent from his couch cordially invited me to enter.

"You send peace to the Humas, who are nothing but red Choctaws, and the friends of the French," I said.

He stared at me thoughtfully, and after a minute calmly replied:

"I do not ask white men what pipes I shall send to red men. I have not made war, nor promised war against the Humas."

"But you have made up a bundle of war-sticks and are burning one each day. The Chickasaws are doing the same; and they are the friends of the English. How can you stick your ax in a red post against the French and not expect to fight the Humas and the other Choctaw tribes?"

He did not relish my questions, nor, perhaps, my manner. Yet we had been good friends; and there was no resentment in his voice as he answered:

"I was about to send back the flamingo pipe. But La Glorieuse opened my eyes. Why send a war-pipe to men of my own color, who want only peace? It would be foolish. It is time enough to send them a red ax when they begin to help the French."

"Damoan the Fox sent the Huma with the pipe. Can my red brother tell me where the Fox is? He is my enemy."

"He is near," was the evasive answer. "He asks to be allowed to watch the funeral tomorrow. La Glorieuse remembers him kindly. I have told him he may come in safety. That was the talk I sent with the pipe."

"He is word-bearer for the Iron Hand," I reminded; and the Serpent had excellent cause to remember Bienville and his masterful ways and his law of "an eye for an eye."

For fully five minutes the chief made no reply; then he came to his feet and pointed to the upright red pole from which were suspended the circlets of red, each commemorating some daring coup in battle.

"No man can call the Tattooed Serpent a coward and live if within reach of his ax," he proudly said.

"Olabalkebiche is a mighty warrior and a very wise man," I declared.

"I do not fear the French. I do not fear the Iron Hand, because I do not fear death. And yet I tell the White Indian that this war against the French is not to my liking. My brother, the Great Sun, wishes it. I love my brother and must, as war-chief, take the path. But I do not like it. The French are our natural friends. They understand us. The English have better goods, very strong rum, but they do not understand us. They do not live with us and marry our women and become part of us. The Chickasaws promised the Great Sun much and made him see things in a dream. The man you call the Fox sends a strong talk through the white pipe. I shall have him tell it to the Great Sun tomorrow after the woman has been buried."

"And if his talk sounds good in the ears of the Great Sun there will be no war?"

"Then the war-sticks will be taken back from all our villages and from the Chickasaws."

"And if the Chickasaws grow angry?"

His tall figure seemed to increase several inches in stature, and his eyes sparkled with anger. He coldly retorted:

"The Natchez have had many Warrior Posts. We are not like some Indians, who use but one post during the lifetime of their oldest men. Our axes have chopped down many a red post. We do not fear the Chickasaws. We do not fear the French. So long as the sacred fires burn we shall go our way and be strong. I do not know what the Great Sun will say to this peace talk."

"What if Iron Hand demands my head?"

"He can not have it."

"What if he asks that the woman be sent to Biloxi?"

"He can not have her. She is your woman."

I was glad *mademoiselle* was not present and possessing an understanding of the Natchez tongue.

"Can Iron Hand have the man Labrador?"

"No!" It was explosive. Then almost gently, although there was no gentleness in his dark eyes—

"His face will show no fear."

I interpreted his cryptic words to mean my friend would die as a part of the funeral ceremony.

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I retired and walked slowly about the village, trying to straighten out my thoughts before rejoining my friends. English influence, working through the Chickasaws, had brought on the threat of war against the French. It would be most important news to carry east should the Natchez back away from their bargain. More insistent was the fact that Damoan with all his cunning would be free within twenty-four hours to walk around the village and ply his arts on the Great Sun. Honesty with self compelled me to admit that the Natchez were naturally affiliated with the French. Of all the valley races they were the most susceptible to French customs and manners.

"White man, you have seen two white eagle pipes today," spoke up a mocking voice.

I stared about me and saw no one. Then La Glorieuse stepped from a cabin and haughtily confronted me.

"The Proud One has influenced the Tattooed Serpent to receive the Frenchman," I boldly charged.

She smiled triumphantly.

"He needed to hear only a few words," she said.

"Tomorrow he will ask his brother, the Great Sun, to tear down the war-picture and send a white pipe to Iron Hand," I continued.

"You have come from him. You should know it."

"But the Great Sun will refuse and will burn the rest of the war-sticks," I taunted.

She took the bait and passionately cried:

"The Great Sun will burn no more war-sticks. He will send the white pipe down the river."

"The Proud One talks like a slave woman, with foolish words," I jeered.

"She knows," she angrily cried, her head very high. Then she added. "She knows, because she knows a sacred fire in one of our villages has died out. The man who failed to keep it alive has been killed. Fire has been borrowed from another temple; but as it must be fought for and not taken tamely, as you snare a rabbit, another man has been killed. When a sacred fire dies it means much evil to the Natchez. The French will be our help against that evil. The Great Sun even now comes home from the village which lost its temple fire. He will be glad to hear the word-bearer of the Iron Hand. And so La Glorieuse speaks like a wise man when she says the white pipe will go down the river, not only to the Humas, but also to Biloxi."

I had forced the truth from her and now knew the worst.

"You tell this to me, an Englishman?"

"By the time you can tell it to your English Great Sun a peace calumet will reach from White Apple to Biloxi," she rejoiced.

"And the white man who came here with me?" I quickly shifted.

"He dies tomorrow and will be buried near his wife."

"But if he is afraid? A coward should not die thus."

"His face will show no fear," she assured me; and it was no coincidence that she had used the words of the Serpent.

Unless Labrador would decorate the morrow's hecatomb he must escape before another sun. Although I trusted implicitly the Serpent's assurances that the girl and I were safe I was most anxious to get away from the village before the Great Sun could be induced to recall the war-sticks from the Chickasaws. I depended upon the latter's friendship for the English to help me along my journey to the English settlements, and their hatred for Bienville would sorely prejudice them against my French friends, especially if he told them the Natchez refused to break away from their allegiance with the French.

In returning to my friends my attention was attracted to a medicine-man seated before his cabin. His name was favorably known among the French for his remarkable cures of gunshot and knife-wounds. It was also said that he knew the medicinal values of some three hundred plants. He was busy mixing vermilion as I paused to give him greeting. As the vermilion was not for war I knew it must be for the funeral ceremony.

"Who is to wear the new red?" I asked, after a respectful silence.

"It is to brighten the face of him who may be afraid to die," he told me.

"And who among the Natchez may be afraid to die?" I asked.

"His face shall show no fear," he mumbled bending low over his task as a hint he would talk no more with me.

The new paint was intended to cover any pallor in Labrador's dark countenance. It

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was a custom of the Natchez, this painting a victim's face, so that none could say a coward's death disgraced the noble dead.

The brief interview with the medicine-man quickened my wits and I began to realize our first problem was to win as far north as Chickasaw Bluffs—Memphis—where we would have the choice of two routes. If we decided we were ahead of the Natchez messenger, sent to recall the war-sticks, we could take the hundred and sixty miles of trail to Chukafalaya—Long Town.* After a bit of rest we could then take to the Cherokee—Tennessee—River and follow its winding course until we were at the back door of North Carolina.

It was remarkable that in all the forest blanket extending from the Carolinas to the Mississippi, and stretching north and south for a thousand miles, the conclusion of my journey would leave me on the threshold of home and yet in a region which was as unknown to us of the coast as if it had been far beyond the Illinois country. Yet I was confident that the trade relations between the Shawanoes and the English would easily gain for me safe passage through the mountains, while the Cherokees at that time were friendly with my countrymen.

For the greater part of the river journey I would have the protection of the Chickasaws. But if the war pact between the Natchez and Chickasaws should be broken the latter would be poor hosts for us to visit, and then we would be compelled to follow the other route. This would mean continuing from Chickasaw Bluffs to and up the Ohio, with the menace of Bienville's long hand following me until I could place a red barrier of friendly Shawanoes between me and my pursuers. If anything had happened during my absence down the river to alienate the Shawanoes we would all walk into a fiery trap. I preferred to follow the Cherokee river-route.

The girl had fallen asleep in the warm sun. Labrador was staring at her most worshipfully. Without arousing her I hurriedly informed him of the new paint, whereat he made a grimace. I told him of the Natchez' strong inclination to take back their war-pipe from the Chickasaws and bury the ax they had promised to raise up against the French. In detail I spoke of the two routes of escape and announced my preference for the overland trip from the Bluffs to Long Town. He readily agreed we did better to trust to the Chickasaws to stand between us and any pursuit, provided they were not enraged by the withdrawal of the Natchez to a point where they must shed white blood.

"The start must be tonight," he whispered. "Anything to save *mademoiselle*. If it would be easier for her to have four men on each side of my throat, pulling on a rope, I would stay here; and they would need no new paint for my face."

"You can serve her best by living and standing between her and danger," I said.

"Ah, that Fox! If I could only meet him when his Choctaws are not at his back! Well, the good God may send that happy day before this is finished. I have made my plan. I will go into the village as if to visit the Serpent, and pass on into the forest—and keep on traveling. I will leave my musket with you and take only my ax, knife and pistol. They will think I am coming back so long as you two are here. And they will never look for me to leave unless I go down the way we came. When it is dark you and *mademoiselle* take the trail to Fort Rosalie, keep clear of the fort and make the river north of it. There you will find pirogues. You will also find me waiting for you if all goes well. If I am not there, make up-river; and if I am along the bank, or on the water, I will pick you up. Damoan and his reds have filled the path along Little River to the Mississippi. Adieu!"

Without waiting to hear my opinion on his planning he laid aside his musket and strolled into the village. He had thought it out very wisely. The road to the fort was well worn and easy to follow even by night. Damoan would not look for the girl or me to leave White Apple where we were safe. The Natchez would not suspect Labrador of planning to escape in the daytime and without his gun.

Mademoiselle opened her eyes and stared at me blankly for a moment. Then sat up and murmured—

"I dreamed of——"

I waited, then prompted—

"Of what, Mademoiselle Dahlsgaarde?"

"I do not like it here. I wish we could be going."

*Pontotoc County, Miss.

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CHAPTER XIII

FAREWELL TO THE RIVER

LABRADOR was waiting for us above Fort Rosalie, and we started on our long journey in a stolen pirogue. We saw nothing of Damoan and his men; and as the days passed I began to hope he had abandoned the pursuit. As we placed greater stretches of the troubled current between us and the hills of the Natchez my confidence was almost complete; and the watch I kept over the river-bends was merely a mechanical working of eye and ear.

At a glance a woodsman sums up all in his field of vision as either being normal, or else he detects something unnatural, such as a dislodged stone, a piece of moss scuffed off a log, a mark left by a canoe in the mud, and his woods sense sounds the alarm, and he looks to his musket, and makes sure his ax hangs loosely. As we paddled along the east shore, sometimes pulling ourselves ahead by hauling on the overhanging bushes neither Labrador nor I could detect any suspicious signs, either behind or ahead.

With the lessening of fear the old influence of the river returned to puzzle my soul. A certain moody abstraction in Labrador encouraged the spell; the sober, brooding attitude of the girl abetted it. It was as if we were all similarly affected. To me the waters from the north whispered of the intrigues of France and Spain and England; a transplanting of ancient feuds to this primeval world, a political seething that for scores of years would seal the continent's greatest road for internal development—that already had permitted even the insignificant Hudson River to become a greater center for Colonial emigration than the Mississippi.

As the wind quickened and sucked down between the forest-banked shores and encouraged the fir and pine to murmuring gossip it whispered to me of the French post at far-off Mackinac, and France's chagrin because the English should reap the bulk of the profits now that the Iroquois were using their influence over the Fox and Green Bay Indians to benefit the traders in Albany.

From up the river came memories of the Illinois Indians and their persistent loyalty to the French. Such thoughts fitted well with my mood when the wind and clouds were making the waters most drear and desolate. During plays of sunshine my optimism would return, and I would rejoice over the English traders' recent discovery that they had easy access to the Ohio and Mississippi, even though they started with their packs from the Hudson, the Mohawk, or the Genesee. What my two companions mulled over I could not imagine. *Mademoiselle* would naturally think of France; perhaps Labrador was dreaming of his Canada; if so, his morose face was no index of joyful anticipation.

So, with no daily crisis to keep us alert, we three subsided and dwelt within ourselves. With danger left behind I had expected *mademoiselle* to become buoyant and more girlish. To the contrary she seemed to be more mature, more thoughtful. At times I almost thought she regretted leaving New Orleans and her countrymen, that she already felt the chill of our more rugged northern clime and was perhaps interpreting it as a symbol of the welcome awaiting her beyond the Appalachians.

Her bearing was less surprizing than Labrador's. He was a Canadian; the north was his true habitat. The steams and tropical smells of the Gulf must be distasteful to one born to breathe the invigorating aroma of the birch and pine. He should be rejoicing now he was returning to the cold waters of his homeland. And he was preoccupied, often depressed, and seldom spoke unless one of us addressed him. Even in answering the girl he first had to tear his mind free from some gloomy obsession.

This was the more remarkable to me who knew him to be as spontaneous and irresponsible as a moose-bird. Instead of the excellent companions we had been to each other in the stress of danger we were three taciturn, solemn individuals, each wrapped in a blanket of introspection.

One night Labrador left our fire and walked to the river bank and stared out over the water. *Mademoiselle* timidly asked me—

"In that Carolina? Are there any French there?"

"Quite a few. Mostly Huguenots."

"Those English? Will they look on me as a queer woman?"

"They will think you a most wonderful little woman. None of them have gone through the dangers and have taken the

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trip you will have taken once we reach the settlements."

"But alone with two men? And dressed like a *sauvage?*"

"They would think you mad to travel up this river without men to protect you, or if you wore the flimsy gowns of the old country."

"Yet they will not receive me as an equal?"

"We have some social distinctions," I admitted. "The landowner naturally lives on a different plane from the landless. Yet there is nothing to prevent the first from degenerating to the lowest plane, or the latter from climbing into the dignity of an estate."

Of course this was false, as there were certain types who never would be socially received, no matter how much worldly gear they might accumulate. She continued—

"If I work what can I do?"

I could not tell her she would have no need for riches did she but have a family behind her. So I clumsily suggested she could be a lady's maid, better still, a companion. Or that she might become a governess.

The last met with her approval, and she quickly replied:

"Little children to teach? Yes! Children are human. They are not to be fooled with useless things—rank, decorations, ribbons."

After a few minutes of silence she said:

"*Monsieur*, that other matter you mentioned as a way to help me. You understand how impossible that would be?"

"So long as you say so, it is most impossible. You should not trouble yourself by thinking of it."

"The river makes one forget. I always think of it stretching around the world. Last night I dreamed I was dead; that the three of us here were dead, and that we must forever work our way up this ferocious stream. I awoke, and for a bit believed we three were dead. I tried to remember just when we died, or were killed. Monsieur Labrador is no longer droll. He thinks of a woman."

"Of a woman!" I exclaimed, amazed at the thought, doubly amazed that she should entertain it.

"Of the Indian woman who died," she softly explained.

"Ridiculous!" I cried.

She lifted her head and stared at me icily, as a well-bred woman rebukes one guilty of an incivility. I was blundering around in the midst of apologies when Labrador returned to the fire. His forehead wore a frown. He did not seem to see us.

"Old friend, you are held by little devils," I said. "Of what are you thinking?"

He hesitated and twisted his fur-cap into a shaggy ball, and then astounded me by quietly replying—

"I was thinking of a woman, *monsieur*."

The girl glanced at me in haughty triumph. Labrador twisted his cap into smaller compass and sadly added:

"Of the Natchez woman. She was very fond of me."

He had no more to confide, and my respect for the girl's reasoning suddenly became exaggerated. Her medicine must have been very strong to have told her such things. It was the last explanation of Labrador's mood I would have arrived at. Once I knew it, however, there was nothing to be gained by meditating on it. It was a simple fact that a single comprehension thoroughly embraced. But the girl's reference to my offer of marriage was an entirely different matter. That contained endless room for speculation.

So we worked up through the towering forest, dodging endless drift and seeing no human beings. The river Indians are poor boatmen and use the land trails when it is possible. At times we swung out toward mid-channel to avoid the brawling insolence of tributaries, whose inflated pride was quickly lost once they felt the authority of their mighty master. We passed the Arkansas, where Beau Law was supposed to settle many colonists on his big grant; and his Alsatian immigrants were either dead of fever, or huddled about New Orleans on little plantations.

THE night before we reached Chickasaw Bluffs Labrador engaged my attention by behaving more peculiarly than ever. He would walk from the fire into the darkness, and then abruptly return. He would stand and stare at me and the girl as if about to say something, and then turn back into the darkness. He repeated these maneuvers several times until the girl urged me to follow him, as if fearing some harm might come to him if left alone. I found him near the shore and had

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to take him by the arm before he would emerge from his spell and sense my presence.

"What's on your mind, man?" I demanded.

"Ah, those Natchez!" he groaned.

"Then it is the Proud One's sister you are still thinking about," I said.

"In part, yes. And there is another—a man."

"What of him?"

"He was a word-bearer—but not old as are most of the word-bearers."

"There *was* a word-bearer?"

"He is dead."

"That tells me nothing."

"I killed him, *monsieur*."

"Then it was a fair fight, I'll swear!"

"*Ma foi!* But didn't he fight!" exclaimed Labrador! Then mournfully, "I did it for *mademoiselle*."

I held my tongue, and after a short pause he continued:

"It was while I was making back to the river to wait for you and *mademoiselle* to come up. I met the Natchez man at the cross-roads, where the path from the fort cuts that leading up from the river. He knew I had escaped from the village so as not to be strangled, and he told me I must go back with him. He was a very brave man. Being a word-bearer on a mission he carried no arms; yet he would have seized me with his empty hands to make me go back. I opened a bag of talk and tried to be pleasant with him. Then he told me two things—that he would kill me if I did not return to the village with him, and that he was on his way to bring home the war-bundles from the Chickasaws, as the Great Sun had suddenly ruled there should be no war against the French.

"Of course it would not do for him to reach the Chickasaws ahead of us, for they would fly into a mad rage when they heard the Natchez would not go on with the war; and being in a rage they would kill any whites they could. Yet I could not kill him in cold blood. So I gave him the choice of my ax and knife, and he took the ax. And we fought. It was over very quick as he was foolish enough to throw the ax. So I killed him because of *mademoiselle* and hid the body where it will not be found in a hurry."

"Why did you not tell me this before, and get it off your mind?" I gently reproached. "You have done a great service to both *mademoiselle* and me. You had no business, however, to risk his getting through to the Chickasaws by foolishly giving him a weapon."

"*Pardieu!* I would have told you nothing except that we are near the Bluffs. I had to tell you so you could know there was no word-bearer ahead of us at Chukafalaya. *Mais, ouil* It was his life or mine. It was not murder. Yet there was the Natchez woman—my wife. There is that Natchez man dead. Somehow, all the way up, the river has been telling me the man had a right to live—the woman a right to happiness. *Monsieur*, I feel like a cursed meddler."

The black spell was upon him, and I pitied him profoundly. Less matter of fact than my countrymen his simple mind was keyed to emotions we English seldom, if ever, feel. I endeavored to cheer him up, to make him realize the great service he had done the girl, to make him remember we were about clear of the river and all its perils.

"*Tonnerre!* I am afraid of no black ——, nor red men!" he protested. "I grieve, *monsieur*, that certain things should be—such as the Natchez woman buried in White Apple; and the Natchez word-bearer buried where none will ever find him. We are leaving too many dead men behind us. *Eh bien!* It is all for *mademoiselle*."

I went back to the girl, fearing she would be imagining all sorts of things if we prolonged our talk. Labrador soon followed me, and to my delight became his old self for the remainer of the evening; whimsical, lovable, and most droll. The girl responded to his mood and smiled demurely at his nonsense. I believed our talk had cured him of his sick fancies; yet when we withdrew to the other side of the fire for the night I heard him sigh most dismally.

The next day opened with rain and we were bothered in keeping the girl sheltered. We stood a musket up in the pirogue and told her she must hold it as placed to protect it from the wet, and over this we flung blankets. The storm blew down the river and was very disagreeable to face, as the rain blurred the vision. Yet I was determined to make the Bluffs that day, and once for all have done with the Mississippi. The bushes along the shore were dripping wet, and as there was no profit in landing we ate our midday meal aboard.

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The girl sat beneath her little tent, and as she pulled the blankets apart to receive a portion of cold meat her face looked ghastly white. I asked if she were ill, but she smiled bravely and said her pallor was due to the half-light. When we landed at Chickasaw Bluffs that afternoon she gave voice to a fervent, "Thank God!" and I knew this last day's river travel had all but snapped her resistance.

"From now on it will be overland travel, *mademoiselle*," I told her. "You may find it hard at first, although the trail is good. We will go slowly until you are used to it."

"Go fast! Go fast!" she urged. "The farther we draw from the river—the miserable—the better I shall feel."

We gained the top of the bluffs, and I led the way into the Chickasaw trail. As a trade-path and connecting the inland villages with the river it was broader than the average path and well-trodden. I explained to the girl how we must follow it for more than a hundred and sixty miles to reach Long Town, and she was glad it stretched so far away and was eager to be off. Labrador, as if bidding farewell to the river forever, went to the brink of a bluff and stared gloomily at the leaden waters below.

The rain had ceased, but the clouds still shut out the sun. I saw him lift his hands, as if in adieu, then leave the gesture unfinished, and lean forward and peer intently down-stream. I called and after a bit of hesitation he turned and swaggered back to us with the long stride of the woodsman. He smiled at the girl, and gave me a look that made me examine the flint in my gun.

"Forty-foot pirogue coming up-stream. Filled with Indians. I think there is one white man in it," he told me in Choctaw, with a flash of his white teeth.

The girl was not to be deceived by his cheery manner, and fiercely demanded:

"What is it? Where are they?"

"There is a canoe down the river, heading this way. We don't know who is in it. There is nothing to fear. If enemies, then they dare not chase us into the Chickasaw country. So if *mademoiselle* will put her best foot forward for a few miles we will laugh at them. Remember, there is no danger. We shall be far up the trail before they can even land."

I meant this assurance only in part. If the newcomers were Choctaws, as I believed they were, we would have a good start which they would exert themselves to the utmost to cut down, realizing our capture could only be accomplished by a dash. Sharp and brisk must be their work if they would not have a band of the warlike Chickasaws to argue with. *Mademoiselle* at her best could make but slow progress. Not used to forest travel and long confined to the pirogue she made me groan inwardly. She believed she was doing famously, and as the Choctaws would hunt us silently, not daring to proclaim their presence by their usual cries of discovery I expected any minute to behold them bounding from the bushes.

Labrador, too, was very uneasy and wished to drop back and guard the trail. I would not listen to his proposition, and muttering under his breath he suddenly caught the girl up and ran with her. She protested and struggled, but he paid no heed. She quickly quieted when she saw it was useless to resist. I raced along at his side and when he tired he passed her to me. And in this fashion we ran, taking turns in carrying her, and making excellent progress. As I relinquished her to him for the second time I caught his eye and nodded confidently. I believed we were beyond all danger. This was his thought, also; for now he was willing to set the girl on her feet. We proceeded more leisurely.

Our awakening came when the girl happened to glance back. She gave a shrill scream. Before she had finished Labrador had her behind a tree and I was under cover on the other side of the trail. There was nearly a hundred yards of the trail in sight, and examine it closely as I would I could see nothing to cause alarm.

"What was it, *mademoiselle?*" I asked, my voice betraying my impatience, I fear.

"A painted face close to the ground," she huskily replied, and pointing a trembling finger at a sycamore half-way down our field of vision. "It was yellow and white," she added in a little gasp.

"I see nothing but dead grass at the foot of the tree. It looks yellow," I said.

"*Mademoiselle* is nervous," said Labrador meekly, emerging from his shelter. "Come. We will go on."

"You imagined it," I told her as she walked beside me up the trail with Labrador bringing up the rear.

"I tell you I saw it! A horrible face, with

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white and yellow stripes running up and down——"

With a low exclamation that was more a bark than any spoken word Labrador swept the girl from my side and darted with her into a clump of oaks. I did not pause to look back, but followed him. There was no war-whoop, but a long arrow slithered against a tree within a few inches of my head as I joined my friends.

"Only a scout," he whispered in my ear. "I'll swing off to the left to stop them from coming through the woods. If they come up the trail you will have some good shooting; and I will fall back to help."

Away he glided on the south side of the trail and taking a course parallel to it. Until the enemy passed him he controlled the strip between his line of advance and the trail. I do not believe they would ever come up the trail in force so long as they could advance on our flank.

"Then he saw it, too!" she whispered, crouching at my feet. "All yellow and white stripes!"

"He saw nothing. He heard something," I corrected.

For several minutes the forest was quiet except for some droning bees in the open trail; then sounded a whistle.

"Why don't you answer him?" asked the girl.

I knew it was none of Labrador's signals, and motioned for her to be still. A musket shattered the silence. Labrador was exultantly shouting—

"I got a good one!"

"*Mon Dieu!*" moaned the girl, pressing both hands to her head.

I peeped from behind the tree and beheld a hideously striped face, white and yellow even as the girl had described it. It was glaring through the foliage a scant fifty feet away and seeking to locate the two of us. I sent a ball crashing through the fellow's head and he made a gruesome business of dying, kicking about and expiring with his two legs showing through the bush. With my gaze focused on the trail and leaving it for Labrador to guard our left flank I reloaded. I heard Labrador's musket again, quickly followed by a pistol-shot. Then Damoan's high voice howled—

"Now you have him!"

I picked up the girl and tossed her high into the forked branches of the oak and warned her to remain perfectly still, and darted after Labrador. I came upon him as he gave ground, his face toward the invisible enemy. He was retreating in a line that would keep him clear of the oaks.

"The woman?" he growled as we came together.

"Hidden in the tree. Fall back!"

He passed on, and I remained to cover his retreat and give him time to load. Damoan yelled again, and a Choctaw brave came bounding through the woods, flourishing ax and knife, and I sent a ball through his painted chest just as he was springing over a log. As he dropped another showed up, and I scored a flesh wound with my pistol.

Then I gave ground, passing Labrador, who was ready for the next onslaught.

"Get the girl and make up the trail!" he muttered.

I ran to the oaks and reloaded and said something reassuring to the girl. The dead man in the trail would hold others back, as they could not know I had left my post to reinforce my friend. If there had been twelve of the enemy in the pirogue there could not be more than seven now left in the fighting. I could count for two killed and one wounded. Labrador had finished one and must have bagged another when he discharged both musket and pistol. I decided we stood a better chance of escaping if we stood our ground and did not make a running fight of it. Off to my left sounded a whistle and the crack of a gun, followed by another which I took to be Labrador's. Damoan was shouting orders. There was no danger of an attack up the trail so long as the Fox led the fighting against the Canadian. Repeating my warning to the girl, I ran the second time to help my friend. Before I sighted him I heard him yell;

"—— dogs! That makes two more of you gone to ——!"

And I heard the hiss of arrows trying to seek out his hiding-place.

I softly called my name, that he might not shoot me for a Choctaw and joined him. He was wiping blood from his forehead and I had a shaft through the flesh of the lower leg. Breaking off the feathered end, I pushed the barbed head through and straightened up in time to nick a brawny warrior who was creeping in on my right.

With a scream of rage Damoan betrayed his hiding-place. The next moment he was urging four savages at us; and I said to Labrador:

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"Only five of them left, Joe! Now for some good work."

My musket was empty and my pistol missed fire. I hurled the pistol into a savage's face and grappled with Damoan. I heard Joe's pistol explode, so close it deafened me; and in the first gyration with Damoan I nearly tripped over the beggar Joe had shot. He was now clubbing his musket and two Choctaws were trying to get inside his guard with their knives. The man I had knocked down with my pistol now slashed at my legs with his knife. I sent the heel of my moccasin into his face, but lost my grip on Damoan, who leaped to help his men finish Labrador, thinking to do this and have the help of the two in a last struggle with me.

I jumped after him just as one of the savages received Labrador's ironshod musket butt between the eyes, his head caving in like an eggshell. But the other —— lunged in with his knife and left it sticking between poor Joe's ribs. I had raised my ax to do for Damoan, but even as it started to descend I shifted my aim and caught Labrador's slayer fair on the scalp-lock so that he fell beside his victim. And then Damoan was on my back.

I dropped to my knees, my head curled down and inward, and finished a somersault, and was on my feet in time to meet Damoan's mad spring. He fired a pistol pointblank, blowing a chunk of leather from my hunting-shirt and a bit of flesh from my shoulder. Then we were locked together, breast to breast.

The sight of poor Labrador, watching our struggle with dying gaze, gave me the strength of several men. I must finish with Damoan and receive my friend's last words. My left arm was behind the fellow's neck. He was trying to get at his knife. I gave him a chance for the sake of getting my right wrist under his chin. He grunted with joy as he pulled his blade free, and I gave a pull and push and snapped his neck in a most tidy fashion before he could even send his point through my shirt. Labrador started to one side and I wheeled in time to behold the savage I had twice knocked down raise on one knee to hurl an ax. I dropped and came up with a dead man's ax and chopped him to the chin. There was a gleam of applause in Labrador's eyes as I gained his side.

"Red rings on a red pole," he muttered, referring to the Natchez style of counting coups. "Get the girl away. Don't stop to bury me. There may be more of them."

"You shall be buried if there were a million," I panted.

I thought he was gone, but he rallied and whispered:

"My wife was a better woman than I was man. She will understand. She was very wise for a red woman. Ah, those Natchez!"

I scalped Damoan, as I had promised him I should do, and stuck his hair to a tree with his own knife. Then I went back and comforted the girl and told her she must remain in the tree for a bit longer; this last that she might not discover the bloody plight I was in. Returning to the scene of the fight I dug a grave with my knife and buried Joe.

Mademoiselle wept bitterly when I rescued her from the tree and told her that Labrador had gone away. Narbonne, Six Fingers, Labrador, and Damoan, not to mention the Choctaws, the Huma woman and the Natchez word-bearer. Taking *mademoiselle* north had cost much blood.

I bandaged my leg and shoulder with her assistance and we covered a quarter of a mile when we ran into a band of Chickasaws, who had been attracted by the gunfire. I told them of the battle and gave Joe all the credit except for the men in the trail. They hastened on to gather the scalps and to leave a hieroglyphic picture carved on a tree by Joe's grave which would keep his resting-place undisturbed for all time so far as the red men were concerned.

CHAPTER XIV

ONE LINE FROM *MADEMOISELLE*

SOMETHING of peace came to the girl as, after a brief stop at Chukafalaya, we followed the windings of the Cherokee. While in the Indian town *mademoiselle* secured new garments of soft deerskin. Our travel was slow, and we were a long time in following the eccentric river through its meanderings. But so far as I was concerned there was no need of hurry. The governors of Virginia and the Carolinas would be very impatient to receive my reports; yet if I were tardy in finishing my journey so, also, would Bienville wait overlong to hear from Damoan the Fox.

The Chickasaws provided an escort until

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we were well within the Cherokee country. As they always camped apart *mademoiselle* and I were much alone together. She never spoke of the past, of the time when we first met on Ship Island, or of her life in France. Whatever half-formed impressions I had entertained regarding her life overseas were washed away by the murmuring current of the Cherokee. Sometimes she was a child, sometimes a woman, and whichever her mood there was a satisfaction that amounted to happiness in seeing her before the evening camp-fire and in knowing she was behind me in the light bark canoe. This feeling of contentment in her presence grew upon me amazingly as we finally drew towards the end of the journey.

One night, with the Cherokee escort chanting some medicine-songs in their near-by camp, I gave way to an impulse, and, bending forward to watch her thoughtful face through the smoke of the fire, I said:

"Once down the river I asked you something, Mademoiselle Dahlsgaarde. I wish to repeat that offer when we reach home."

"Home?" she whispered, lifting her head and staring at me strangely.

"I wish to make it home for you," I awkwardly explained.

She smiled sadly and lifted a hand to prevent further talk of the kind, and firmly said:

"That is all finished, my friend. We will not speak of it more."

This second refusal left me feeling entirely different than had the first. It dawned on me that my proprietorship was about to end; that the days of my arranging for her comfort were soon over. If I had been prompted by an exaggerated sense of chivalrous duty when I first asked her to take my name at least I had not been downcast by her refusal. Her tears had forced the offer from me. This, my reentrance into the forbidden subject, had no such unselfish incitement. My face must have grown very long, or else my trick of pulling at my beard gave her the suggestion. For she said:

"In leaving it once for all I will say this to *monsieur*, even though it is not maidenly to speak of it further. You pitied a poor girl who was entirely unknown to you. You heeded her plea to be taken north when you had all you could do to save your own life. Her company has forced you into many dangers and has cost you a dear friend. It has greatly delayed your arrival home. In addition to all this, through your sense of duty, you offered marriage to this waif, who has no family, no history. *Monsieur*, you have exhausted all the sacrifice that the most tender of heart could be called upon to make. I won't try to thank you with words: but my heart will always thank you."

"I don't ask for any thanks," I glumly replied. "That other time, you spoke of your pride, of pride standing between us."

"A pride that forbids me allowing any one to make *every* sacrifice for me," she evasively corrected.

"I did not read your belts that way," I doggedly retorted.

"Belts?" And her hands flew to her girdle.

"Your talk," I interpreted. "The pride you meant was that which one feels when thinking an inferior is making advances."

Her face was as scarlet as the northern maples when the frost lays on the vermilion. She tried to be angry, and there was a flash in her eye that bespoke a shrewd temper.

"Claire Dahlsgaarde, a nobody, so proud she feels hurt when an honest gentleman offers her marriage? Oh, la la! Surely some English as well as all the French believe in fairy-stories!"

"It is what I believed then," I insisted, refusing to be laughed out of the notion.

She sighed and said—

"If such an impossible could be, then the woman must be crazy."

"I believe it. I can now see you as you looked then. There was no mistaking your mood. You felt almost insulted——"

"*Mon Dieu, monsieur!*" she wailed.

"I say it."

"Stop!" she commanded, rising and standing in the smoke of the fire to stare into my disgruntled eyes. "If you really believe such madness, *monsieur*, and really wish me for your wife——"

"I am crazy," I cried, rising and backing from the fire. "I am a fool, and am making the finish of your journey very unpleasant."

"If you believe what you said I shall be proud to marry you to prove my gratitude," she murmured.

"That would wrong both of us. I love, and must have love in return, or nothing. I am a very foolish man, *mademoiselle*.

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Big men often are. Give me Indians to fight each day and I am normal. Leave me to amuse myself, and I am a fool. You will try to forgive me and forget it all. I walk over to question the Cherokees about the mountain pass we enter tomorrow."

"Just a moment, *monsieur*," she hurriedly said. "If sometime—after this is all over—you feel the same as you seem to feel now you may tell me."

With an unconscious return of the *grande dame* air she lifted her head high, and gravely added—

"You have my permission."

Pride? She was made up of pride, from her toes to her braided yellow hair. Why? Who could say? Certainly not I. Her lapses into the imperious were both irritating and fascinating. Such a high bearing was an absurdity, and yet it placed an air upon her which would make men covet her. As I retreated to the Cherokee fires I knew my dreams were ended, and that the quicker I submitted my reports and returned to my work the better it would be for my peace of mind.

I TOOK her to Charles Town, as all the planters were there, or on the neighboring islands for the hot season to escape the fever, and presented her to some family friends as a French refugee. While trying to relieve her of money worries without offending her quick spirit she told me she had a few jewels on which she could realize and get along until she heard from France. Then I left her, our parting being in public and on the surface showing nothing, and I was off for the north to finish my business and get acquainted with my own people.

What with official business in North Carolina and Virginia, and a request that I go to Pennsylvania and tell the Quakers all I had learned, it was several months before I could relax in the home of my people. New Year's day found me moping about the plantation, trying to avoid intruding on a young squire who was frantically in love with my little sister. A black boy brought me a sealed message from town, which bore my full name on the outside. Opening it I read:

Monsieur le Sauvage Blanc. It may be I shall soon be sailing for France. C. D.

The note bore no date and there was no knowing how long it had been on the way. I ran to the stables, bowling over the young idiot who was daft about my sister, and secured my horse. I have no clear recollection of the days which followed. The time it required to reach Charles Town I estimate in horses. I used up seven by the time I quit the saddle in King Street. I was informed by the black town butler that Mademoiselle Dahlsgaarde and the family were at the plantation on the Santee, having gone there after the first frost had ended the fever-season. I breathed a bit easier. I was between her and the seacoast.

As I was making the last stretch along the river-road—for I went by horse, a barge on the river being too slow—I was wildly accosted by a man who spoke French. There was something familiar about the fellow's voice but I was in no mood to renew acquaintances; and I galloped on with his meaningless, "*Monsieur! Monsieur!*" ringing in ears which heard nothing. Before making the plantation I reined down to a walk and recovered some of my composure. On my way up the winding drive I saw a young woman at one side, standing by a hedge. She softly called to me, and a closer glance revealed her to be *mademoiselle*.

She was dressed in the mode, and most wonderful to gaze upon; a severe little person, withal, for a travel-stained man to approach. I turned my horse loose for a black boy to catch and stable, and hurried across the lawn and stood beside her.

"*Mademoiselle*, sometime ago, I do not know how long, I received your message. I started immediately. I have tarried none along the way," I said.

She had difficulty in adjusting some twigs of the hedge to her liking, and her voice was so low I could scarcely hear it as she said:

"I told you once that should you feel the same as you did that time on the river—that second time on the second river—there could be no harm— Ah, I put shame on myself to speak more."

"And I repeat I am a very foolish man and must have love where I love," I stammered.

"Such a hard man!" she sighed, with a quick uplift of her eyes; and I could swear she was laughing at me.

"You brought me here to have me propose marriage to you?" I bluntly demanded.

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"It is shameful to make me say that. But it is true," she mumbled.

Even then I feared she was sacrificing herself to me because of some absurd sense of gratitude.

"But your pride——"

"Enough of that word!" she fiercely cried, clutching both my hands and turning eyes filled with tears for my inspection. Then humbly:

"Does *monsieur* find pride in me now? Or does he find a poor, homeless, homesick girl with no friends, no people?"

My arms would have closed about her slim form had she not had a second thought. Withdrawing from me and holding her head high and haughty she accused me:

"You dared to think wrong of me on that island off Biloxi! You dared to think weakness of me because I came on that terrible ship! Not a word, *monsieur!* I will listen to no defense!"

As poor Joe Labrador would have said, "Ah, that Mademoiselle Dahlsgaarde!" In her moods she was as irresponsible as a butterfly, and as irresistible as a sunbeam. I lied bravely and sternly, and severely lectured her for presuming to read my thoughts and then to convict me on whatever conclusions she might happen to form. The rigidity of her pose gradually relaxed while I talked. By the time I had finished a discourse on the evilness of "pride" she was quite limp. And when for the third time I asked her to marry me she did not refuse.

OUR wedding was two weeks old and I was still as ardent a believer in fairy-tales as any Frenchman. Then my host demanded my attention, and informed me that the man who was so insistent on seeing Mrs. Brampton was again calling.

"I believe the fellow must be crazy, William, but it's for you to dispose of him. He bothered her some before you came."

I vowed I would scalp him, and directed the butler to bring him into the rose-garden back of the house. He came, and behold he was the man who had yelled to me as I furiously galloped up the plantation road in search of a wife. What was more astonishing he was Jules Mattor, my boatman when I escaped from Pascagoula Bay.

I sternly inquired his business with Mrs. Brampton, and with much squirming and twisting he told me how he had brought her a message from Biloxi, it being written by no one less than his Excellency, Sieur de Bienville.

"And *monsieur*, I have waited six weeks, and she will give me no answer to carry back. If I go without an answer his Excellency will believe I did not do his business, and he will use a hard hand. *Mademoiselle* would not give me an answer. Can not *monsieur*, who is so big and strong, induce *madame* to write just a word?"

I sent a boy to fetch Mrs. Brampton. As she entered the garden and beheld Mattor she smiled slightly, but there was nothing but happiness in her face.

"*Madame*, this man, Jules Mattor, says he brought you a message from Sieur de Bienville and fears he will be punished if he returns without an answer."

"So?" she softly answered. "Then he should have an answer. And has *monsieur*, my husband, been told what the message contained?"

"I doubt if the messenger knows. I certainly have not asked him."

I turned aside and became interested in a rose-bush. With a swish of skirts she was at my side and explaining:

"They found out directly after I sailed. Word came by the very boat which followed the *Maire*, the very boat Bienville went out to the island to meet that night you escaped from Biloxi. Think of it! That very night Bienville had his orders from my uncle, the marquis, and if you had been a day late they would have bundled me back to France and you would have no little wife to make you happy this day."

I gaped at her stupidly and muttered:

"The trail is very blind, *madame*. I find a sign here and there."

"Foolish one! I knew it would come in time. That was why I was determined to marry you before you learned the truth."

"Aye? Well, you did it."

"Because I feared that once you learned the truth your silly English pride would send you back to the terrible forest and that abominable river, and I would return to France, or stay here unwed. Here is the message. Read it."

She pulled a paper from the bosom of her gown, but I refused it, suggesting that she tell me what she would. She settled herself primly on a rustic settee and made an imperious little gesture for me to be seated.

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"It is like this, my love. My mother was a de Buade, a distant kinswoman of Comte de Frontenac——"

"Pride!" I exclaimed, beginning to understand.

"Her family would have none of her because she married a Dahlsgaarde. After both she and my father died an uncle was named as my guardian. He is a friend of Monsieur le Regent, and being a marquis and having great wealth he is a very sad dog. His tastes and Monsieur le Regent's are the same. The two plan to marry me to an execrable creature, who has much gold, a great family name, and the morals of the devil. I refuse to marry the beast. Terrible times follow. I am fresh from the convent. I know little of the world. I am terrified when my uncle, the marquis, says it is the Regent's will that I marry his choice at once. They bring the man to me.

"He is hideous, and old enough to be my father. I swear I will not wed him. My uncle, the marquis, says I shall. I am nearly insane. But there are wonderful stories being told about the Mississippi country. Every one is making a mountain of gold just by buying John L'as' stock. The very servants gossip about the magic of Louisiana. Every one is kind. There is nothing but happiness. The day draws nearer the hateful wedding. I can kill myself, yes; but life is young; life is sweet if not poisoned.

"I dress in a maid's gown and take a few of my jewels and escaped to the coast. The day I reached the port I learn an immigrant ship is about to sail. I go aboard just as they are about to start. Ah, such women-wolves were in it! Then that island and Biloxi! Then that odious *la Nouvelle* Orleans—the second Paris! I was crazed with fear and horror, *monsieur*. So I wrote to you. That is all."

"Very good. I am glad it is cleared up. Nothing from those experiences can ever come into your life to make you sad."

She rose and asked—

"Are there no questions, my dear?"

"No questions, sweetheart."

She glanced down at the letter and laughed aloud as a child does when immensely pleased.

"*Ciel!* But I forgot Sieur de Bienville's letter! I have told you nothing of it. I must have no secrets from my husband. It seems his orders are to place me on the first ship returning to France. He is much concerned to have me go back. Monsieur le Regent is vastly interested; and that means Monsiegneur L'as will do anything to get me back."

"—— them all! All France can't get you back!" I cried.

"O-o-o!" and she drew back in a pantomime of fear. "Such terrible words my husband speaks! But his Excellency writes most polite. He the same as says I shall dictate my own future. A ship will take me from Charles Town, or Pensacola, as I wish. It is arranged with the English Government that I may go in an English ship, if I wish. I am warned not to return by the way of the river, as it would be too dangerous. You should feel very proud to find me a woman of so much importance. Now you know all. Will you keep me?"

"Against all Europe!" I told the top of her head.

She struggled free and cried:

"But you never ask about the old pirate. Such a polite husband! I know you die of curiosity. He was an under-gardener at my uncle's country place. He saw me steal away from home, and he followed me. He was a very wicked old man. He followed me on board the ship, planning to make a fortune out of my disappearance. He knew there would be a great search and a big sum in gold offered. He would wait in the new world till he could drive the best bargain; then he would betray me. He was very wicked."

It was all told. I felt humble and meek, but took care it should not show. So I urged her to get rid of Mattor by sending an answer to Bienville.

"*Ma foi!* As your wife I think it would be better for Mr. Brampton to write the answer," she replied. "Else why did I keep this poor man waiting until you came here and married me?"

WE'VE traveled far together since those old, brave days, and many of the myths have been killed out of the valley. A miracle she never wearies of contemplating is our twin boys. I called them English and she flared up and declared them to be French, and before I could join the issue she was in tears, and saying they were neither French nor English, but were Americans. And so she brought them up to consider themselves.

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A second miracle she could scarcely comprehend was their astounding growth until they were my equal in stature. And her pride! It towered above all other pride she had ever felt, as the heavens overtop an ant-hill. Their obedience and reverence when with their mother was very beautiful for me to watch. As they became Americans and carried her along with them I ceased calling myself English; for one must go with one's folks, or else feel very lonely.

Narbonne and Labrador; Six Fingers and Damoan the Fox. The good and the bad. Yet somehow the mighty river utilized both elements to give me my wife. And I wonder if its other seemingly blind purposes may not contain some hidden good for those who ultimately build cabins in the valley.

THE END.

Plants on LIFE

by Bill Adams

Rough-Necks

ON GETTING home I found a letter from a man who wanted to know how I came by his name. It appears that he has the same name as a man in one of those stories you took off my hands. Well—I thought he was going to sue me for a million dollars damages; but, progressing with the letter found that he was not. He said, I am just a common rough-neck—and oh, boy—I was delighted. I do like to meet common people. I hate to be mistaken for the thing *called* a gentleman. I was raised amongst the rough-necks, and have lived with them. I hope to die loved by two or three of them. I love real poetry; and I find it *in the eyes of common men.*

There is, to me, more poetry, more real culture, in a dirty old cuss of a working-man stamping home with his empty dinner-pail than there is at a swell hotel banquet-table where a circle of high-brow critics are seated to discuss the latest big book by the latest big poet or writer or some such rot.

Biggest things lie, strange though it may seem, out in the bright open spaces under God's high heaven where common and illiterate men foregather to earn their daily bread. I don't give a —— what any critic says—I've been there and I know. Give me the education that comes from mixing with my humble fellows. Oh, yes—I can mix with the professors also, with the high-browns, and can talk their language. But there is less of music in it for me, than in that of my rough-neck pals.

I often wonder how long the culture stuff would last in some of the high falutin' folks if they had to carry a hod up a ladder for an eight-hour day; or to swing a pick and shovel, or to turn concrete for a month in Summer's sun. I had a letter from a friend telling me that I do not read enough. Maybe I don't; but, thank heaven, I can always find a friend without having to go sticking my nose into the pages of a book to look for a dead one in dead words.

When I was a boy at school my teacher told me I'd never be a success if I was not better at my Latin. Well, that's the sort of teaching they hand out. There is just one sort of success worth while, unless I am all up the wrong tree; and that is the success that comes from being conscience free in the knowledge that simple, plain-minded, common people can call one friend.

For any other culture I don't give a tinker's ——.

That's a word you don't allow in *Adventure*, and I'm glad you don't but I have stuck it in, in capital letters, for it seems to me to fill the bill.

I don't like to hear a man do a lot of unnecessary cussing. But—Gosh—when a man says to me I'm just a common rough-neck I say:

"Put it there, old son. So I am, and what's more I'm going to remain one despite all the teachers, preachers, poets and professors on earth—for the Almighty made us all common men. I want to be one of the gang. Which, unless I'm very much out, is *His gang.*"

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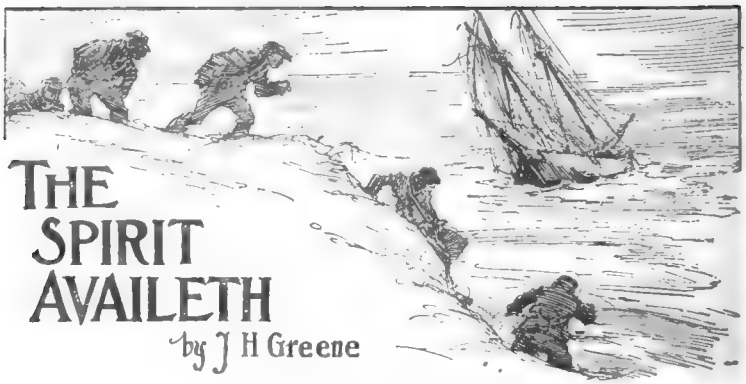

THE SPIRIT AVAILETH

by J H Greene

Author of "The Joss on the Forecastle."

DECEMBER, with the first real Winter weather, brought hard work to the Life-Saving Station. The thick nor'easter, splintery with sleet, hid the half-way house from the lookout, so a day patrol was necessary. Two dories had to be helped off the bar, a yacht warned off shore; another, signaling engine trouble, had to be towed by the cutter to the inner bay.

"Flounders must be up in Boston Market," remarked Captain Sparks as his glass caught a glimpse of a gasoline dory. "And there's another yacht to the south'ard. Any one would think this was Florida."

Si Adams, who was on watch in the tower, had just entered the service and did not feel called upon to reply to his chief. All of Si's nineteen years had been lived close to coast guards, but, once sworn in, he soon learned he was only a green youngster, and a jocose snub he had received last night from the captain made him cautious about adding his opinion on so many dories out in bad weather, and yachts off the Cape in mid-Winter.

He had the night patrol; no Summer stroll by a moonlit sea with chats and coffee from Summer campers, but a cold drill in and out of the long loops of surf. It is not safe to walk the ridges, for the seas sometimes underwash them and they collapse at a step, bringing the great chance of burial or drowning, or both.

He had deposited his brass check in the half-way house and was returning when he saw a schooner too close in shore. She was altogether too near the bar his station was set for, those shallow sand ridges that interrupted and broke the wide sweep of the Atlantic rollers, causing them to spout up from the sea's bottom in leaping live masses clawing over one another's backs. The schooner bore no lights and was probably off her bearings.

Si took his first act of individual responsibility and burned a Coston light, holding it over his head and shielding his eyes from the glare. When his night sight returned, he could not see the schooner. There was no answering flare. She had probably hauled out and was lost in the smother of rain and spoondrift.

Si returned to the station against a gale laden with sleet and sand. He was warm and glowing inside his windproof, not so much from the shelter of that monkish-looking garment, but because he had saved a schooner from going ashore, because he had taken his first step in the most heroic, the most ignored, the least rewarded of Services. He reported his action but with too many words.

"When Congress wakes up to our existence, my lad, you'll get a medal," said Captain Sparks.

Therefore Surfman Silas W. Adams from now on determined not to claim credit, to be as casual as these men who fought storms and kept families on a mere pittance, who accepted no gratuities, who had no pull but their own at their oars.

"The Spirit Availeth," copyright, 1923, by J. H. Greene.

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The following morning, after breakfast, a schooner was reported in trouble. She was easily made out in the gray, rain-streaked morning, for her canvas was new. Her jib was blown to tatters, and her fore-sail was down, the throat having come away. But her mainsail was stowed.

"Better anchor, my lads," muttered Captain Sparks as he observed these details through his glass, speaking as if he were advising the crew of the schooner. "No dories on her. It's that Nova Scotia craft."

The swept deck of the schooner was lacking in the two nests of dories, packed one within the other, that every fishing-schooner carries.

But she anchored as if her captain had heard the advice of the captain of the station, and the tug of her cable on the bows brought big seas aboard. The gear-cart, with the line-reel, the gun, and the breeches-buoy, was driven out in the sands, and the horse harnessed to the life-boat cart. A line could not be shot to the outer bar, and it might be necessary to take out the boat. Captain Sparks waited, but he had not to wait long, for he knew the bottom of the sea as well as its surface.

"I thought so. Anchor ain't holding. She's drifting. Better cut your cable and chance coming ashore, Mr. Bluenose," said Captain Sparks.

The life-savers, waiting for a word to them on the sand, could see axes lifting on the schooner's windlass. Si saw the bright yellow of the inner strands of the cable as it parted, and the long black hull plunged shoreward.

"She'll go on the outer bar," said Si to the man near him.

"She would anyway with that drifting anchor. It would take a cutter to haul her off now. We couldn't, for she weighs more than a dory with a barrel of fish and she's loaded," said the man phlegmatically.

Again Si restrained comment. This was his first wreck, and whatever he wanted to know was forgotten in watching the long deck of the schooner go under the smother of the outer bar and little black figures creep up the tossing rigging.

The gear was wheeled up the beach to windward of where it was judged she would come ashore, if she did not stick on the outer bar.

"She struck. See her masts shake," said Captain Sparks beside the gear-cart.

Si could see the crew clinging, spread-eagled on the ratlines, for the surf seemed to be trying to shake them into the sea.

"Only two dories on her," said the captain. "I thought so—a rum-runner. Why don't he lighten her?"

Figures were seen on the deck, dimly, out of the arching spray.

"He's battening down. Won't heave over a case. That bluenose has nerve. No salvage for the boys in town out of this. Hello, she's made it. Ready to shoot, there."

The sand-bars had not been able to grip the keel of the schooner. She was out of the first line of surf, tossing in the less whitened but immense wave peaks massing for their final crash on the beach, with her bowsprit stabbing skyward.

The first shot from the little brass cannon missed the line and was carried to leeward. Si saw a man high up in the main rigging try to reach for it and, as the hull rolled, nearly fall into the sea at the attempt. But the second shot brought the line inboard, and the bluenoses knew what to do without consulting the bilingual direction board.

The breeches-buoy was running as she bumped for the last time hard and fast on the shore, the full tide careening her, trying to roll her over as contemptuously as if she were a mere pungo. The crew were taken off—easily and surely. They were mostly canucks in wool caps and were grinning and grateful.

Si stood nearest the water, hauling on the line, and the incoming waters, at the flood and storm driven, foamed to his knees.

"No need to stand so close, Si," called Captain Sparks to him. "Boots ain't what they used to be. Dry feet are as good as a feed, my lad."

The last man to come off before the captain of the schooner was the little dark figure in a blue pilot jacket that had nearly been lost reaching for the first line. He was foolhardy again, dropping into the buoy with only one leg in the breeches. As he left the rigging an extra powerful wave smote the schooner's side, the mast tipped to the land, the line sagged, and the buoy dipped in the water.

Si ran out after the receding foam, caught at the man washed out of the buoy and sucked in the undertow. A chain of men held on to Si and the two were hauled in.

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The rescued man was small and lithe. With his dark eyes and clear, olive skin he looked like a boy Napoleon.

"By gar," he laughed. "Ver' close shave. I tank you, *messieurs*. I am Pierre Leboudeux, mate of zis *pauvre Sallie*."

The little mate grasped Si's hand, but Si had to return to his line, for the captain of the *Sally* was still to be taken off, whereupon the eager little half-drowned Maritime Provincer took a hand on the rope as well. Captain Sparks bade him follow the rest of the rescued crew up to the station, but Pierre paid no attention. He hauled behind Si half-humming, half-whistling "*Alouette, gentile Alouette*," that interminable chanson of the habitant.

THE captain of the schooner was more careful than his mate. He put both his boots through the canvas breeches and was hauled ashore high over the surf. He was French too, squat, square-faced, red-jowled as if carved out of the rocks of his St. Pierre. He shook hands with Captain Sparks and then planted his legs firmly in the sand.

"I am Capitaine Blanc of St. Pierre. I have cargo of wine, brandy and weeski consigned to St. Pierre. I claim stress of weather."

"That's all right," said Captain Sparks. "Better come along and get some dry clothes and a feed. Got your papers?"

Captain Blanc produced a seal-hide wallet.

"I don't want to look at them now," said the Coast Guard captain. "Come and get warm first. We'll talk it over round the stove."

But Blanc did not seem anxious to leave his schooner, which was now hard, fast and beam-end on the beach.

"How much have you got?" asked Sparks, mentally calculating the hold capacity of the wreck.

"Here ees my manifest!"

"——, man, I can't read print with my eyes full of weather and sand. How many million dollars is your cargo worth?"

"I have three hundred cases. I throw over las' night sixty to lighten her."

Captain Sparks was weary with the additional complexities added to his calling. It did not seem his business to question the rum-runner, to make the deductions of a detective, to correlate the missing cases with the unusual fishing and yachting activities of the last week. His work was done; he had saved life; he had given a good schooner a chance to be salvaged. The complexities were up to the Customs. He would telephone them.

"All right, Captain Blanc," he said. "I'll put a guard over your hold, and now come inside. Your hold needs ballast."

Meanwhile the line had been hauled in and the gear got ready for the next call, which might come at any moment out of the welter of trailing rain and gnashing surf.

"Any of you men wet?" asked Captain Sparks of his crew. "I want a guard."

They were all wet, yet ready to volunteer, but Si spoke first.

"Why, you're soaked, lad."

Windproofs are the warmest and driest of coverings, far better than oilskins, but the hood had been blown back from Si's face, his hair and the top of his underclothes were wet, and he had gone into the water over his boots.

"Only the outside, captain."

Captain Sparks smiled at the boy's spirit, for Si was a boy to the captain's thirty years in the service. But the captain had to consider his forces. Fresh and more arduous jobs might be tossed up by the waters at any instant, and the youngster was more useful as yet ashore than in a boat.

"You stay and let no one aboard," was his order to Si as he took the wrecked captain and mate up to the station.

Si was left alone on the beach to get what comfort he could from the lee of the stranded schooner. Food and coffee were brought to him at the dinner hour but no relief, for a call had come from the station to the west, where three coal barges had come ashore. Two men were lost off them, and a lone woman was left on one unwieldy hulk that rolled over its shifting cargo in the surf.

LATE in the afternoon young men in overalls and sea-boots, worn, town-cut coats and sou'westers, appeared out of the long grass that shivered on the edge of the dunes. News of the wreck had reached the village. Si could hear autos panting on the far road.

The men were friends of his, till lately his school-fellows. Some were distant and forgotten relatives in the close connections of local families. Some had names on the

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Mayflower compact; others were Portuguese; all were his friends. The cars, too, he knew by ear, for till he had become a life-saver he had driven an ice-truck.

"You can't go aboard, Man'l," said Si, stopping their leader, a black-eyed, black-browed, impetuous young trap-fisherman.

"Why not? She's wrecked. Ain't we going to have a whack at her?"

The *Sally* was not wrecked technically, for she was not a loss till the underwriters said so and her cargo was spilled on the beach. Si forgot his wet clothes and warmed with dignity as he explained the ethics of the situation.

"What book did you learn that piece out of, Si?" laughed Man'l. "You'd be sitting in this game yourself if you hadn't gone life-saver. ——, you can't tell us what to do."

But Si could, and with anger too, for the others had joined in Man'l's laugh at the way the life-saver had parroted his lesson.

"She ain't wrecked, I tell you. This liquor is under bond and you wouldn't be robbing the Government but the captain. It's his."

This argument was equally futile with the would-be wreckers and a hoarse howl of derision came from the crowd pressing round the hull. For the captain of the schooner was well known in these waters, both within and without the three-mile limit, and his profits could easily stand the rake-off of a few cases.

It only needed a touch to provoke a fight and arouse a boarding-party, till three uniformed men appeared on the ridge sauntering calmly from the station side. They wore oilskins, but every one knew the havelock cap of Captain Sparks, who opened his coat as he saw the gang around Si, displaying a belt and holster. Besides, the captain carried a loose belt and another holster in his hand. The wreckers became immediately and professionally curious about the torn throat of the schooner's foresail.

"Strap on this, Si," said the captain. "We've had a phone from Boston to put an armed guard on this cargo. Orders are to shoot if necessary."

The wreckers tried to bluff by asking if the schooner was to be put up for sale, if the captain thought she was likely to go to pieces, but they had become aware of the abyss between a frolic and a crime and soon departed sulkily up the ridge.

"Sorry I can't relieve you, lad. The Customs promised to send men down hours ago. Could have got here by the afternoon train. It's their work, not ours."

Captain Sparks was beyond the age when he could have retired with honor, but he had stayed on in the service because he was still fit, because he loved his command of this loneliest of stations that shivered with every wind on its shifting sands, the finger-tip of America reaching out her hand to the drowning. He looked after the retreating figures.

"About this shooting," he hesitated. "You will use your judgment, of course. You've sworn to uphold the law in peace and war, and this ain't one or t'other. Seems to have the dirty ends of both. Why, I've seen them kids grow up. They're no worse than you or me. Oh, to —— with liquor and liquor-dealers."

He blasted his curse out to the ocean while his gloved hand smote the schooner bulging like a barrel over the drying sand.

"And this is the real stuff, Si. No moonshine here. French brandy, West India rum, and the Scotch is the kind they make for the king. I'll save you a snifter when you're off. Those canucks took to the rigging well heeled."

He flushed, not from the Scotch but at finding this flaw in his integrity. This man, as clean as the sea and as open as the sky, was angry at his own hypocrisy.

"Don't let that gang put anything over on you," he growled. "The whole town will be out tonight with cars and wheelbarrows. We don't want a black mark on our station and the inspectors smelling our breaths and feeling our pockets pretending to see if our oilers are worn. You—you've got to shoot."

The man of many storms, with his surfmen, who had stood by ready for any order, strode off, leaving Si with a perfect understanding of his chief's embarrassment. Si was learning that duty is harder than pulling an oar or walking beaches, for he had been stung by the contemptuous looks of Man'l and his gang.

Man'l was right. Si would have been on their side if he had not enlisted in the life savers, for he, like the boys, had been bred to the creed that what comes ashore belongs to the beach-comber. The fishing village back of the dunes he had been raised in lived on the gifts of the sea. Si was

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compelled to hold back his gift of a wreck, with the threat of that other gift of the sea—death. The life-saver was ordered to be a life-taker.

As the night closed in the wind shifted to the north, the skies cleared, swept by arctic winds; a moon, shining like an icicle, lit the waters; and out of the open spaces dropped a gripping cold. Si felt that the glamour had gone from his calling.

The waters now merely splashed under the counter of the schooner. Her booms and rigging were hung with drippings frozen to glittering pendants. Her ice-coated deck and cabin roof were warped mirrors to the moon, and the spray that fell inboard clinked, freezing as it fell.

He was alone on the beach, out of sight and hail of the station, trying to get shelter from the hull in a wind that had knife-edges. For though neither wind nor water could penetrate his suit, the cold could, and invasive chills blew up his trousers and found entrances under his hood. The cold was making him sleepy. His supper had not brought much warmth, as one grows colder after eating.

He was aroused by a faint sound that seemed to come from inside the schooner.

IMMEDIATELY he thought of Man'l and crept carefully up to the long incurving bow. He bent under the stay and looked round, his gun foremost. Man'l and his gang might have stolen along the weather side—perhaps waded along the beach—and then crept on board. It was what Man'l would do. Si and Man'l had broken into many Summer cottages in Wintertime for a shelter to play cards in. There was no trick in light burglary Man'l and he did not know.

But there were no foot-prints on the sand as far as he could see up the beach. They would hardly wade. Those loops of foam could pull like a block and tackle, for the undertow was dragging out. The boys would not risk walking too close to the surf. They might do more from the sea. It was still rough, but those boys were as good surfmen as any in the station, they might risk running in a dory.

But he could see none. The horizon was a clean-cut line, and the air was now clear. He could see low stars and ships' lights, but nothing like a dory in those peaked shadows and shining wave-tips. Nor could he hear the sputtering of any motor of a gasoliner. Not even the boys would risk a row-boat.

But again he heard that faint tapping, till he was relieved to find it came from the hide sheathing of the bobstay, sewn on to protect the wire in ice floes. The hide had come away and was fretting against the bows.

The incident aroused Si to the possibility that he might be attacked from any side, that the high hull giving a lee could also cover the approach of the wreckers. So he now determined to keep a watch to windward as well as up the dunes.

This duty was worse than any he had ever heard of—patrol or life-boat service—listening to the land as well as the sea, walking that ice-sheathed schooner, with a brief rest against her lee bulwarks. With his elbows on her rough timbers that melted wet with his warmth he thought of the treasure in her hold and tried to obtain imaginary solace from the nearness of those brews of Highland heather, those spirits of French vineyards.

For he was very cold. His boots felt as if they had leaked. His face had that itch of drifting cobwebs complained of by men in the Arctic. He gave a sharp turn to his drifting thoughts, to clear himself from those highland lassies and mam'selles that sang from the bottles packed a few inches below. But he could not lift his elbow. His sleeve was frozen to the bulwarks, and his feet were iced in the sand.

He heard the exhaust of a motor, different in its beat from any in the village, for he knew the cars of the town by sound as a seaman knows sirens and foghorns; and he saw shadows that moved among the grass on the ridge. With a great effort he lifted his deadened feet and forced his numbed fingers to draw his gun.

"Stand back there fellows. You know I've got to shoot," he shouted.

The advancing figures stopped, till a voice that Si could not recognize, a city voice, called from their rear.

"You're not afraid of one man. Rush him."

"Rush himself yourself, mister. You get his gun and we'll haul the booze."

It was Man'l who answered. Si knew that his friends had been reinforced by some outside bootleggers. He was able to hold his gun with more determination, for he had less compunction in shooting a

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stranger, an exploiter of adventurous youth. Then he was startled by another voice hailing him down the wind from the station. A man was rushing him. Si was menaced on front and flank.

"Keep back, or I plug you," he called.

The man was very close. Si had loosened his congealed limbs and was able to take a step, to cover the man with a steady aim. The man threw up his hands and laughed.

"You save me, now you shoot me."

The man was Pierre Leboudeux, the mate of the schooner, whom Si had hauled from the surf. Si dropped his gun, for he had heard alarmed voices from the ridge. The pale levels of the sands were clear of the clustering shadows of the wreckers. They had fled, probably thinking Pierre to be a Coast Guard carrying another gun for them to rush.

"I breeng you dees. I geef de udders all I have and I forget you. I am ingrate."

Pierre lifted a long bottle with a little liquor in its heel to Si's lips.

"Thanks, but not on duty," said Si.

"Oh, ver' well. Eet ees not worth keeping. I get you some more when you relieved."

Pierre drained the bottle.

"I thought you were one of those bootleggers trying to get me," Si explained remorsefully, remembering how close he had been to shooting the kind little canuck.

Pierre, who had resumed his eternal song of the swallow whose wings he was going to pluck, interrupted his gaiety to gaze sternly up the ridges.

"Dat ees wrong. Dees liquor ees not your Gov'ment. Eet will be shipped out again."

"I tried to tell them that, but they can smell it. And there's big men with bankrolls behind this drive. Have you got a gun?"

Pierre had not, but he replied by a mere shake of his head, for his set lips were hissing his "*Alouette, gentile Alouette, Je te plumerai à la bec.*" That chanson with its interminable verses equally effective in love-making or liquor running, as a chantey off the Banks or a barcarolle in the Kootenai, hissed from his set teeth like a whispered Marseillaise. He tried to make out living figures on the dark, root-fringed crests of the dunes. Those "*alouettes*" up there, those swallows, were not going to get his liquor without his plucking them to the beak—*à la bec.*

He looked over the bulwarks and reached for the long pump-handle lying loose in the scuppers.

"*Ah, dame!*" he cried as his bare fingers touched the blistering cold iron, for he had taken off his gloves. "*Je te plumerai à la bec.* I mak' dese birds fly away home. I fool dem weeth dees. I keep watch weeth you."

He put on the necessary glove and shouldered the long bar. It was so curved at one end that at a distance it might pass for a rifle.

But neither he nor Si had much confidence in this stratagem, so the canuck lifted a leg easily over the bulwarks and tried to climb the deck.

"Trow som' sand so I can walk," he asked after he had glided back into the scuppers.

Si stooped to break a handful from the frozen beach, but the effort to straighten himself was an agony, and he fell to his knees groaning.

Quick as a monkey Pierre was off the schooner, trying to lift Si to his feet and knowingly feeling inside the clothes and down into the boots of the life-saver.

"*Dieu*—you freeze. Do not go to sleep. Answer me; tell me you are awake. Say you hear me," called Pierre, shaking Si.

"Sure I do. Just got a kink in my back."

Bidding Si to stay awake at any cost, to bite his tongue, to knock his head against the timbers, to inflict on himself any pain possible to that end, Pierre forgot the wreckers and climbed back on to the schooner. This time he walked the slippery ice-sheathed planks like a skater. He gave an impatient kick at the padlock holding down the battens on the canvas cover of the hatch, made his way aft and disappeared down the cabin.

SI WAS obeying the canuck's instruction, at least in intent, for he was suffering a pang for every erect inch he gained as he tried to straighten himself. He forced himself suddenly upright as he heard heavy blows and the crash of splitting timber. For a second he doubted Pierre, and he limped, with those frozen muscles of his trying to bend him into a hoop-backed cripple, till he came to

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the bow, where he again edged his gun round the cutwater.

But no stealthy gang in league with the canuck was cutting its way into that bulging beam. The planks, shining with ice enough to reflect the incoming white of the surf, were intact, save where the seams had opened from the battering of the seas, where the oakum hung in shreds.

He returned to meet Pierre, who was climbing out of the canted cabin and singing gaily as he removed the straw jacket from a bottle of cognac.

"Here, dreenk dees. Eet ees doctor's orders," he said, trying to pour the liquid into Si.

"I can't drink on duty, Pierre. I ain't been long enough in the service. I got to make good. It's no use asking me. You had no right to go aboard. You broke into the hold from the cabin. Lemme go. Take that blasted bottle away. Don't you know I'm allowed to shoot you?"

Si had smelt the liquor, had almost tasted it, and between the anguish in his muscles and his native pride in doing a painful duty he was rough with Pierre.

The canuck drew back, carefully took the cork from the pocket of his jacket and, politely asking Si to wait, recorked the bottle and put it inside in an interior pocket. He was not singing now.

Si was angry at his own weakness and more than angry at the canuck's behavior. Did Pierre expect him to shoot in cold blood?

It seemed to Si impossible to carry out this duty unless he was drunk. If he had taken the brandy he might bring himself to the point of pulling the trigger. All he could do now was to wave the gun. To shoot this kind-hearted little fellow who had left the warm station to bring comfort to his freezing rescuer was all wrong—whatever else was right.

"I've got to shoot. Don't you understand? It's the law? You broached the cargo; you, a sailor, a mate, broke into a hold. You got to put that bottle back, nail up that bulkhead and go under arrest. I have to protect this cargo, and I am ordered to shoot."

"*Bien.* Why did you not shoot when I go aboard."

The calmness of the canuck maddened Si.

"Why don't you do something," shouted the perplexed life-saver, for he could not answer Pierre's question, which was an accusation.

If the liquor was stolen, officers and lawyers would be asking it also. Si naturally welcomed the intoxication of anger. It would help.

"Why don't you get mad or put up a fight? You're a thief, a smuggler; you've broken the law. You took an ax to that bulkhead, and I let you. Put that bottle back."

Pierre seemed quite unimpressed.

"You freeze," he observed. "Your hand shake, your voice 'ave shivers. I tell your *capitaine.*"

Something warm kindled in Si, the stubborn pride of his breed that stiffened his shooting-arm and steadied his voice.

"If you make a move to the station I shoot. I ain't hoisting distress signals. Mind your business."

The canuck did. Waving aside the gun as a ridiculous triviality, he made a move toward Si, quickly took a strangle-hold round the life-saver's neck and poured the brandy into his shirt.

"Take eet easy. I save you now. Dees weel keep you warm. Eet do not freeze. We som' times stan' watch weeth eet in our boots. Now I light you a fire as well."

Releasing Si, he ran up the beach and soon returned with an armful of driftwood. Si was burning; Pierre's prescription was good. After the first chill the alcohol set his flesh tingling and the warmth spread inward without reaching his conscience.

But the fragments of old ship-timbers, the boxes and barrels, however dry within, were ice-coated and would not burn. The two men bent over, shielding the matches from the wind.

"Will you objec' eef I go aboard and get some kerosene?" asked Pierre.

"Why kerosene?" said Si, stopping him. "There's some brandy left in that bottle."

Si was experiencing the fuel value of alcohol.

The gill or so that was left was poured on the wood, another match was lighted and a blue flame crept over the wood. The dry interior of the drift timber caught, and the blue flame grew to a warm fire. But the men warming their fingers forgot it gave light as well.

"Are you fellows going to make a fight of this?" called a voice out of the dark, and Si reached for his gun, which he had put back

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in the holster. "Don't draw. Put up. We've got you covered six ways, and we're in the dark. Back to the schooner and down her cabin."

HOLDING his head back to take his eyes from the firelight, Si saw men advancing with outstretched hands, and on the ridge were carts and horses, light carts that could be driven over the sand. The bootleggers were in force, and resistance at present was useless; so the two backed to those armed advancing hands till their shoulders touched the planks of the schooner. Here the leader of the bootleggers, close-capped and muffled against the cold and observation, bade them halt till he removed Si's gun and searched Pierre.

"Now, inboard and mouths shut," he ordered.

"Tell you what we'll do," whispered Si as he felt his way round the careened cabin. "We can slip over the stern. The boom and the stowed mainsail will hide us. These fellows won't think we'll pull anything; we laid down too easy. We can keep out close to the surf and make the station."

Pierre was inclined to debate the suggestion. He had already felt the drag of that surf, and he knew the quality of these booze buccaneers. He could hear their quiet orders outside, boots slipping on the deck, axles creaking as the carts drew near.

"I teenk we are defeat," he said, climbing the canted steps.

Above him was the smashed wheel, the mainsail sagging from the boom torn from its crutch. There was cover enough to escape, and the cabin was high enough to hide them. The question was whether the beach was guarded.

Sibilating his "*Alouette*," no longer a battle-song but rather a resigned and stoic dirge, Pierre tried to see the sand. He lit a match for his cigaret and immediately a large fragment of a split block was hurled through one of the windows.

"No lights, you in there," bellowed a heavy but guarded voice.

Pierre put out the match. His neck was encircled with a strangle-hold now and Si was whispering in his ear.

In that brief flash of illumination Si had seen the bulkhead Pierre had cut away, and the hold beyond packed with yellow cases marked "St. Pierre et Miquelon, 12 Bouteilles."

"Got plenty of matches. Good. Don't speak. Keep that jazz of yours going strong, but way down in G. Let them think we're licked. Got any rags or tow?"

Pierre began tearing up the captain's bedding.

"No, this straw is better," said Si. "Load them all."

As the bootleggers pried open the hatches the deck glittered with blue flares. A bottle flaming at the neck from a wick of straw fell in their midst and burst, for it was thrown to break. A bombardment of such brandy bombs followed. The liquor spilt and crept, burning over the deck, over the bootleggers. They were seeped in spirit and clothed in its flame.

Si and Pierre had prepared plenty of ammunition before launching their attack, enough to drive the men over the side howling, cursing, screaming, to roll on the sand, to plunge in the surf.

Si, mad with fight and the fumes of the brandy, came from his cover out on deck, calling for Pierre to hand him up the fire-grenades.

"Save the ones with the wicks," he cried. "The others will do now."

To save the prepared bottles Si flung corked ones wherever there was flame to be merely fed.

"Cases, Pierre; bring cases."

For the men, more surprized and scared than burnt, were massing for an assault. Si placed his bombs, lit and unlit, where he judged best, at faces climbing over the bows, at men seeking shelter under the counter, till fore and aft the deck ran with burning brandy, and the air grew thick with smoke from burning cables and canvas and molten tar.

Somewhere up the beach a shot was fired, then another, then a fusillade. Pierre saw what he thought were gun-flashes and aimed a lit bottle. It fell among some men near the fire, the fire blazed high. There was confusion among the bootleggers, and a rivulet of blue fire the wind could not extinguish flowed along the sand.

"At the beach," cried Si. "Set fire to the beach."

"*Oui.* Gran'; a fire barrage. *Je te plumerai à la bec.*"

Captain Sparks and the master of the

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schooner ran along the beach, and the crews followed. The flare and the shots had alarmed the station. A horse, trying to bolt from a cart full of burning nets, tore past the life-savers. A man came next, shooting as fast as a gun-barrel would turn. Captain Blanc leaped at him, struck up his arm.

"I wasn't shooting at you," the man said when Captain Blanc struck him to the sand for his lie.

They came to the schooner like a firework set-piece, and back in its smoke some one was singing. Suddenly the exhausted alcohol died out, leaving a few outlines in sparks from the charred ropes and sails. The schooner was merely singed, though the wood of the cases Si had thrown to burn the beach still flamed. Captain Sparks, climbing over the bulwarks, found Pierre clinging to a stay and Si lying face up on the unbroached hatch.

"Drunk," he roared.

"Yes, *m'sieur*," said Pierre. "But not weeth dreenk, only de smell. He save de cargo; de schooner she no damage. He fight lak packet o' crackers. Gran' fellow! Listen, *m'sieur*. He was sober when he fight. He gran' fine fellow. He save de cargo at de expense of seex or seven case. Dat ees cheep. You tak heem home and give heem medals. He gran'."

The little canuck forgot his laughter in his impassioned plea for his friend.

"But I tell you one teeng, you fellows. Nex' tam you make dese kind of fight, *capitaine*, tell your men dey must use de right kind of liquor. Si here wanted to t'row all kinds. He don't know dat weeski do not burn like cognac. Your men must be instruct in liquors, *capitaine*. Dat ees why I put de weeski in hees boots."

Voices hailed from the sand. Man'l and his gang had turned in their flight at the accusation of murder bellowed at them by Captain Sparks and were crowding to the bulwarks, a frightened, remorseful array.

"Say, cap," said Man'l. "We ain't in on this shooting. We said we wouldn't raise a hand if there was any shooting. We ain't got a gun in the bunch. Ain't that so, mister?"

The last question was addressed to the bootlegger Captain Blanc had knocked down and who was still held by two life-savers.

Man'l urged his defense, no longer the hard-voiced wrecker, but a boy pleading for boys, who, cowed and almost tearful, watched Si's limp figure lifted from the hatch.

Captain Sparks was about to berate them when the bootlegger interrupted.

"He's right captain. Only one shot was fired on purpose and that in the air to scare your man. The other shooting was my gun and cartridges exploding in my pocket. My clothes were on fire. See, my pockets are blown out."

The evidence was sufficient. Captain Sparks was mollified.

"You're lucky, you young beach-rats," he growled. "Si's only half-shot."

As the life-savers were lifting Si over the bulwarks Pierre begged them to wait.

"Let me tak' off hees boots. Carefully, *m'sieurs*. Now put heem to bunk."

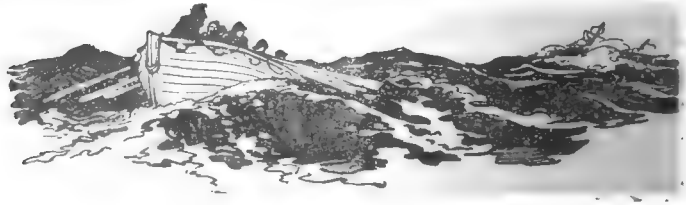
Pierre then leaped on the sand and addressed Man'l.

"Everyteeng all right. You fight, we fight, we win, nobody hurt, we all good fellows. Will you 'av' a dreenk? Dere ees seex quarts of good Scotch in dese boots."

Pierre began handing round the boots; but there were no takers. Every one wanted to carry Si.

"Empty the stuff, Frenchy, and put his boots back on him," cried Man'l. "His feet will freeze. It's zero."

Pierre obeyed with a shrug, Si was borne to the station, all hands packing round him, smugglers and life-savers, in one friendly mass, to lend him their warmth, to act as a windshield for him.



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The SHELLERS

by Raymond S. Spears

Author of "Fretful Muncher," "The Ranger," etc.

IN THE Arkansas Bottoms, down the St. Francis River, three shellers gathered mussel button-stock from the clear, green water depths, using grab-tongs to bring up a dozen or so shells at a time. Their bannister boats worked on as many beds of shells, and the men lived in amity on the sand-bar in the river curve of Wild Goose Bend.

One was "Old Pete," gray, bent and lank, who had been trapper, hunter and feather killer. Another was "Jim-Eke" Gride, a restless-footed, Cumberland Mountain hill-billy. The third was "Kid" Shaler, a youth who was gaining experience.

They tonged their thousand pounds of shells in a morning, and shucked them out at the vats in the afternoons. At night they gathered around a pot-fire on the sand-bar, cooking their suppers together. At no time of day or night were they out of hearing of one another, and Kid Shaler played a French harp, even while he tonged shells, having a wire shoulder-frame that held the harmonica to his lips as he spread-eagled on the tong-handles, then levered them over the bannister-rail into the scow shell-box.

After supper one evening the three sat by a driftwood fire. For three months they had toiled steadily. Frost had killed the mosquitoes and only during the sunshine of the day a few large brilliantly metallic-blue bottle-flies circled and hovered around. The shelling season had nearly passed.

Up the bank three heaps of shells about equal in size showed the result of steadfast industry, day after day. The three men had made ninety days' work, making up even for the stormy days, which meant forty-five tons of shells for each one. The eye could discover no variation in the quantity. The scales alone would show which had a few hundred weight the advantage.

"Well, boys," Old Pete remarked, "we've shucked an average-up run of shells. I figure mine's sorted out five tons of fancies, forty of buttons."

"The buyers sure will leave some money down this Wild Goose Bend!" Kid Shaler shook his head, wonderingly. "Five tons at eighty dollars is four hundred dollars, and forty tons at fifty dollars is sixteen hundred dollars—that's two thousand!"

"Is that all?" Jim-Eke inquired slyly.

The other two started, staring at him. They knew well enough what he meant. Not a word had been said all that season, since St. Francis dropped down from high-water, about baroques and pearls. The three had met there as strangers. They had found three shell-beds in the same bend, and working the long, cutlas-shaped beds, almost side by side, they could see one anothers' shells. They could not see the gems that were found when they hovered over the shucking-sinks. But they knew that seed pearls, slugs, baroques and perhaps valuable "shapes" had been found. The luck, and all profit, show in the values of

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beautiful pearls of price. A sheller never tells of these to strangers—if he is wise. These shellers were wise.

Comrades, camp mates, swamp friends, fellow toilers—they had trusted one another with many secrets. Old Pete and Kid Shaler knew that Jim-Eke was a scouter from the feud country, where he had killed a man; if he were caught, they might take him back and strap him in the chair.

Old Pete and Jim-Eke knew that Kid Shaler was a runaway boy who had a wealthy father and mother away Down East, somewhere, and those parents had crowded the boy to make him win school honors; they had cut his money down to nothing, so he would "be a good boy"; and they had bound him tighter and tighter till one day he slipped through all the guards and fled to live on his own.

Jim-Eke and Kid Shaler knew that Old Pete was family-troubled. He had been a decent citizen back yonder, in Ohio or New York, one of those Down East States, but his wife and children hadn't approved of him; he was no 'count in his manner of dressing, and lazy, and, while his folks tried to make a gentleman of him, he was all the time slipping into vagabondage, which his proud wife couldn't stand. So there had been court business, alimony, and a lot of such stuff as that.

"I expect my folks is earnin' their own livin', now," Old Pete sighed, "for, if they wouldn't let me earn my living and enjoy myself in my own way, I wan't going to support them, and live in their way, too."

Thus they knew the courts, police, and juvenile delinquency people were hunting them. They knew where one another came from. They even knew that there was $1,000 reward on each one of them. But, shucks! That was nothing—no temptation for a man who was in trouble himself, and knew how it felt. Yet they were wise; they knew pearls; if they had pearls, they would not let their luster be seen by even fellow fugitives. No indeed!

TWO kinds of pearls are found in mussels by button-shellers; one are good pearls, the others are bad pearls; nobody ever knows which is which, unless he is gifted with second-sight. Take any one with second-sight, and good pearls look like pretty tricks, with a lot of money in them; but bad pearls look different, for they have the malignant glow of hawk eyes, or snake eyes, or the even more baneful gleam of human scoundrel eyes. Take a string of fine, matched, fresh-water pearls, and they may all be as like as cherries on a tree, or thorn apples on a haw-bush. Their beauty is glorious, and on the throat of a beautiful woman they share their loveliness, and are thrice more wonderful.

But if one pearl in a rope is sinister, with that evil way of the wicked gem—look out! If anybody doubts, ask a sheller, ask anybody who ever had anything to do with pearls—

Ho hum, but a mean pearl sure is trifling, mean and common, yes, indeed!

Among humans it is not good to have secrets. Yet wise ones know that what the other fellow doesn't know will not hurt him. The struggle in the hearts of the three shellers on Wild Goose Bend bar was between faith and suspicion, coupled with the feeling that a wicked pearl would only make trouble—and each one of them had a pearl of price.

Jim-Eke's sly suggestion had fallen on uneasy consciences. Men long to brag of their own good fortune, but where that fortune is wrapped up in a pearl of great price, there is danger in the temptation which lies in a fortune that will slip into an empty twelve-gage shell and yet would buy a farm, or a steamboat, or even a good business in a big city. The three sat staring into the driftwood flames, the gray wood hissing softly, and flaming from red to white, pale blue and green. They could not talk.

Jim-Eke wore an Army canvas cartridge-case belt, containing ten compartments. In this he carried his jack-knife, cigaret makings, money, compass and 22-caliber pistol ammunition. Suddenly, he reached into one of the compartments and drew a tobacco bag from it. This he emptied into the palm of his hand. A score of tightly wrapped paper wads fell out, and when he opened these on an aluminum plate, his two mates saw dark or spotted slugs and clear, shapely baroques; some of them so well-colored and pretty that they would doubtless sell for ten dollars or more, each.

Then the others displayed their baroques, and pearls of uneven shape. They admitted to finding a lot of seed pearls, and other tiny shell products which would sell for several dollars an ounce. Still, they made

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no claim of finding pearls of great price. Jim-Eke did not show his, and the other two did not show theirs. When the fire burned down they went to their little wall tents, and the sand-bar was quiet, except for the plaintive cries of wild fowl coming down over the timber, or resting in the still waters.

The shelling season had come to an end. The following morning several shell-buyers, summoned by the three, came to look over the heaps. They tested the shells for brittleness, looked into the heaps to see if they ran heavy or thin. They scrutinized the fancies, or pistol-butt, knife-handle, and other shell stock, to make sure that the assortment was clean and good. They made figures on their pencil-pads, studied and regarded one another with alertness, each hoping against hope that neither of the others had cash enough to take the offerings at rates acceptable to the shellers.

The three shellers knew the game. They sat on log-chunks, whittling calmly, answering questions but not particularly excited by the swagger-business and sniffing of the shell-buyers. The buyers tried to get together on the purchase, and divide it up. This would have been easy enough had they been so lucky as to be able to bring into a buying combine Delos Chetson, who was after shells and was willing to pay for them.

"Gentlemen!" Kid heard Chetson say, "I am here to buy shells. I don't go running around on fool's errands. These are a good lot. I shall bid a good price, and you can bid what you want, for all of me."

There was some argument, and finally one offered forty dollars flat for the button-stock, and eighty dollars for the fancies. None of the others made an offer immediately, but after hesitating a minute, Chetson said:

"Those shells run mighty clean, boys; the price of shells is up, and the market is strong. I figure I can give you forty-five dollars a ton for the button-stock, and one hundred dollars for the fancies."

The other buyers glared at him. They opened their mouths to protest that it was a trick, and that the market wouldn't stand it.

"You better look at his scales," one said angrily.

"I will set my scales right here, and we will weigh the shells. I will buy them at any scales' results—yours or mine," Chetson replied.

"Reckon your scales will satisfy us," Old Pete said, and the other buyers took their departure. They dared not compare their scales with those of the "Wild Buyer."

Then the three shellers and the successful bidder went to Kid's pile and, putting up the shell tripod, began the business of weighing the shells—a long and tedious job.

Chetson chuted the shells down into his twenty-ton barge, and his boatman trimmed the cargo. At the railroad landing, upstream, he unloaded into a car, and Kid's take filled the car, with five tons of fancies left over. The take in Wild Goose Bend filled three big cars, and a box-car carried the fifteen tons of fancies.

Chetson paid the Kid on the spot, cash, as the last forkful of shells pulled down the steelyard balance. For the button-stock—$1,845; for the fancies—$510. The boy gazed at the big brick of bank and treasury notes. He looked away as he thought of what it meant to him. This was his second season tonging. He had learned the game. He was rid, now, of the fear that he would be forced by hunger and privation back into the ruts that his parents had planned for him, in spite of his own will, which was as strong as that of his father or mother—perhaps as strong as both their wills put together.

Old Pete's take was next along the eddy. They worked to ship him, too, and when the last forkful of fancies fell into the huge scoop, the buyer paid him $1,824 for the button-stock, and $536 for his fancies. Then they loaded Jim-Eke's shells, and his take for the season down that fresh bed was $1,850 for button-stock, and $495 for fancies.

"You had a good eddy, boys," Chetson declared. "She cleaned?"

"We left spat and crackle lines down both sides of each bed," Old Pete replied. "They'll spread and in five years, there'll be another big take for somebody down here, if shellers don't come along and skin the little shells and spat-growers."

"If shellers wouldn't tong so close, shelling would go on as long as the country wears pearl buttons," the buyer said. "I noticed, first thing, you must have been throwing back the thins and smalls."

"Yes; we sorted every grab, as we swung it over the bannisters," Old Pete replied. "Threw back all the too-smalls."

"Bet that paid, too, account of your finding cripples, didn't it?"

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No one made any reply. The shellers could not admit that it had paid without also admitting that they had found the pearl-bearing cripples.

"We took right smart of slugs and baroques," Old Pete at last admitted. "I expect we needn't complain none, speaking of luck."

The buyer nodded. With tact he did not pursue the question of pearls, directly. Indirectly, he proved his friendliness and appreciation.

"A friend of mine, Lawrence Robarge, is up the line, pearl and seed buying. You might talk to him?"

"If he's a friend of yours, I'd be glad to," Old Pete replied heartily.

The other two nodded.

"I'll send him down in a day or two, this week certain," the shell man replied, adding: "Take care of that money, boys. It's a good friend in need!"

HE DROVE away in his noisy, shoal-draft launch. When he was at least a mile distant, the shellers put away their money. Old Pete grinned as he slipped his into a grimy money-belt. Jim-Eke studied his thoughtfully, as he counted it again. The Kid stared at the sand.

"Well, youngsters!" Old Pete remarked. "If you take my advice, you'll salt that money, for money is a man's steady friend."

"I'll salt mine!" Jim-Eke declared. "You know, they 'lowed I done meanness? Well, I didn't, but I had no money to prove hit. Now I have, an' I'm going back to stand trial."

"That's best!" Old Pete declared. "Always face the music!"

Something in his own phrase stopped his breath for a moment. Then he added, after gazing across into the woods thoughtfully:

"I don't know but what it's best in any case. I quit, back home. I reckon I'll go back. This money—" he half-chuckled—"I reckon this money'd just about square me up, and I could start in business on the other——"

"Sho!" Jim asked a tactless question. "Yo' found a big un?"

Old Pete shook his head, and Jim-Eke flushed with embarrassment. That was a question that mustn't be asked. Kid Shaler walked over to his tent, and Jim-Eke saw something where the youth had been sitting.

"Hi-i! Yo' drapped a trick!" Jim-Eke called, reaching to pick up the packet.

As his fingers closed on the wad he trembled. The boy came running to snatch that tell-tale lump.

"What—a pearl-shape as big's that!" Jim-Eke continued, and Old Pete saw the boy backing away, fear and excitement in his expression. The youth had found an enormous pearl, perhaps worth thousands.

Jim-Eke tossed the Kid a match-box made of high-pressure brass pipe, an inch in diameter, with a screw-cap, and brazed bottom. The boy swung it on a cord from his neck, with the pearl in it.

They cooked dinner, and immediately afterwards, Kid Shaler struck his tent, packed his outfit, and abandoning his old bannister boat, backed out of the landing, and headed away down the St. Francis in his skiff with the out-board motor throbbing.

"S'long boys!" he called regretfully.

"I'm glad he went," Old Pete sighed. "But he'd never ought to gone downstream. He'd ought to hit the railroad for Mendova."

"I fought that pearl all the morning," Jim-Eke admitted. "I could feel hit shine through that silk and paper wrapping. Ho lor! Hit's big as a sparrow's egg."

They could neither talk nor think of anything else than the pearl, when two hours later "Larry Hobart," the pearl buyer came down. However, they had their own pearls to sell, and they sat down to bargain over them. On their rude table Hobart spread a piece of rich, black velvet, and on this the pearlers emptied their seeds. Hobart bought them. Then the two spread their slugs and baroques. He bought them. One by one they rolled their jewel pearls, and one by one he appraised them and then bought them.

He was a good man, and the two knew he was making every bid on the square. If he was in doubt, he said so, and showed the blemish, imperfection, cloud, dimple, flat or dead space that spoiled the perfection of a pearl. The piles of bills he paid were held with red rubber bands. Everybody knew those bands!

The two men had toiled steadily, and their shells had varied but little in weight and value in the season's reward. Their luck showed in the pearls. Old Pete received $5,670.80, and Jim-Eke $1,244.75.

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At that, both of them had been extraordinarily successful—few shellers ever having made as much even as Jim-Eke in a season. Their shell-beds had been prolific bearers of pearls. Old Pete was just simply favored by fortune, that was all.

"How about the boy Chetson told about?" Hobart inquired.

"He pulled his stakes yesterday evening," Old Pete replied. "He just went off down the river."

"Any slugs or pearls?"

"Mr. Man!" Old Pete replied. "That boy had a pearl it wasn't safe to show to any man."

"Yes?" quickly.

"Yes, suh," Jim-Eke added. "If that boy'd stayed in this camp last night, I 'low he'd shore risked a heap—and we've been his friends, admirin' him, too, yes, suh!"

"It's so!" Old Pete nodded. "A pearl as big as an egg—a sparrow's egg——"

"So!" the buyer exclaimed. "I'd admire to buy it!"

"A man'd murder his best friend for it!" Old Pete shook his head. "I know that kind of pearls——"

"Yes, and so do I!" Hobart shook his head. "The —— himself is in them. Well, I'll be on my way. Much obliged for selling to me, boys."

"Chetson recommended you," Old Pete replied, "and pearls are hard to keep in a man's pocket."

"Yes, sir, you're right! I'm shoving these right on, in a hurry."

CHETSON went on down the river. He was no sooner out of sight than the two shellers began to strike their tents and pack their duffel. In their belts were little fortunes. To one the money meant lawyer's fees and a trial "to come clear." The other man was not yet sure what his money might mean to him.

Old Pete wondered to think that he had been so lucky, and his industry so profitable. They separated at the eddy, Jim-Eke going up to the railroad bridge, where he sold his outfit; the older man, turning off down the river, followed the wake of the pearl buyer and Kid Shaler.

Thus countless groups of shellers were breaking up and taking their departure, up and down the shelling streams. Some had played against laziness and hard luck, and their season was gone without profit. Others had worked over old shell-beds, picking leavings, and their lack of initiative to explore for new shell streams had left them with day-wages or less. Where shellers met and passed the time of day, gossip was repeated.

"La'rence Hobart drapped down," somebody said at Mucket Camps. "He was asking for Kid Shaler. Who's Kid Shaler?"

"I don't know," another answered. "Perhaps he's found a big un. Feller up to Railroad Crossing said a sheller shucked out a big un."

The whisper went far and wide that an enormous pearl had been found somewhere up Wild Goose Bend way. The whisper became a rumor. By and by, the word was around that Old Pete, Jim-Eke and Kid Shaler had fished in that bend, and that Kid had accidentally shown an enormous pearl, one worth thousands—and sinister vagrants, river-rats, followers of the shelling excitements were stirring uneasily.

Larry Hobart was an old pearl-buyer, keen and watchful, careful in his dealings. He must carry large sums of currency with him, but he trusted no stranger, and turned his back on no man. He had passed shellers by in his haste down the river, and he had called ashore for word about Kid Shaler. Why he asked he did not tell, of course, but the shellers suspected, and when the rumor spread, they knew that Hobart was hunting that wonderful pearl.

Some thought that rumor had made the pearl too large, too valuable. Many a time a buyer has been fooled into making long journeys seeking priceless pearls, only to find on overtaking the fact that the jewel was off-color, or crinkled. Yet often not in vain buyers had made such pursuits.

In the meanwhile the youth Kid Shaler camped in lonely bends, and avoided the river-people. As he steered his skiff he replied to hails of greeting from the bank with a gesture or a nod. He watched the willows, the wooded banks, the distances, ahead and behind, with restless eyes. The spirit of the Bottoms oppressed him. Night or day, he was conscious of that treasure in the copper-tube match-box hanging in its canvas sheath. He mistrusted every man. Well he might. Any pirate would attack him to rob him of the pearl, which rumor and innuendo said he had.

"Peg" Lent swung by the place where Kid had gone to hide and rest. Lent was the

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gambling boatman at the eddy below the railroads. He caught the shellers there, going and coming. A bad, mean man, Lent always had a crew of river-pirates near him. Sight of the gambler at his boat on the river struck home to Kid Shaler the jeopardy he was in. Lent hunted big game. Shaler felt in his bones that the story of the big pearl had leaked, and was ringing in that scoundrel's forward-flaring ears.

The boy's face hardened, his shoulders squared, and the furtive dread in his eyes faded till his gaze was cool and strong. Down in his heart he resolved to go home.

"And I'll go home, standing up!" he said to himself.

Just that quickly like the snap of a finger, the fiber of Kid Shaler squared itself with the world. He swung forth from his hiding and returned up the St. Francis, standing erect in his boat, and steering it with the sway of his body or the touch of his long-handled paddle. His nerves did not slacken, nor his vigilance waver.

"It's my pearl, and I'm going to keep it!" he said to himself. "No man can take it from me!"

The swamp seemed enormous and deserted. He saw wild turkeys on a sand-bar. He shot fox-squirrels from a tree to eat. He saw a camp of shellers up the bank, and when he waved a greeting their slight gestures indicated their recognition. They had heard that Kid Shaler had a great pearl. They knew his jeopardy.

He slipped up into a brake to camp out, and rolled up in a great, water-proof tarpaulin to sleep. Hours later he awakened. Nothing had happened. He listened, but could hear only the busy activities of squirrels in an oak back in the swamp. He awakened angry that because he had been lucky he was being hunted up and down.

Up the river was Peg Lent's boat, close to town, where he covered worse crimes by gambling. The shellers all knew that scoundrel was in cahoots with river-pirates. Kid Shaler knew it, and had even seen furtive scouters coming down Wild Goose Bend between midnight and dawn, when honest people seldom were obliged to travel.

"He's back of this huntin' me!" Kid Shaler told himself. "He's warned folks—he's put pirates into the brakes to hunt me, and he's trailin' me himself."

The river outlets were under surveillance. The traces through the mucky bottoms were hardly passable, and Kid felt the cold chill of helplessness and dread as he saw the enmeshing of the scoundrels who kept the shellers and pearlers subdued. Many of them were victims of bully ways and threatening gangs.

He had been on the river two years, having fled from restraints, from people who watched him, from the over-care of those who loved him. Now he found himself in a network of folk who envied him, and perhaps one who would even murder him for his belt full of money, and who planned to rob him of that great and glorious pearl.

He looked at it. The jewel was more beautiful than ever. No wonder men would do murder for that thing, turning its loveliness into a curse. Kid could see nothing sinister in it. He could see only the beauty, the radiance, the luster, the glory of it.

"No man can claim that but me!" he told himself, and with determination he kept boldly on his way up the river where the pirates swarmed, watching every passer-by.

"I don't have to hide out from any man!" he said. "I don't hide away from any crook like Peg Lent!"

DUSK had fallen and with the suddenness of the Southern night, darkness ensued. Kid Shaler started his out-board motor and steered up-stream. In an hour he was running into Shinbone Reach, where the gamblers had their boats, and the crews that bled the pearlers and shellers lurked beside the river to work their grafts.

Peg's long, low boat loomed with its big carbide landing-lights, and Kid steered to the stern of this one. He had seen a swift launch making ready to swing out into the eddy to follow him. He dropped a loop over a cleat and sprang on board. He felt in the breast of his mackinaw shirt to make sure he was ready.

Some one had heard him coming, and the trembling of his leap on the deck had been felt throughout the length of the forty-foot hull. Kid flung open the door, and walked into the smoky, silent cabin. A crap-table and four or five poker tables were in the long, low room. A hot stove with a pot of coffee boiling on it stood in the rear corner. Shelves on the walls held dishes, packs of cards, and other articles. Hats, coats, fiddles and banjos hung from nails on the walls.

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All these, for Kid Shaler, resolved themselves into the dozen men on board, and in turn, these centered in the pale face and blazing eyes of Peg Lent, who came rushing into the cabin at the bow. He had started out in the swift launch, but now came on board again, rearing. He took three quick steps forward.

"Hello, Kid!" he called. "Been looking for yo'. Where yo' be'n?"

"I have come to ask you what business you have looking for me!" Kid replied, sharply. "What do you want of me?"

Not in ten years had any one talked to Peg Lent like that. The lean smile whipped from his face as his lips curled angrily. Kid caught a glimpse of a familiar face and glanced to the right. There was Jim-Eke.

No need to wonder why the mountain man had not gone back to stand trial for the murder of which he had been accused. Kid Shaler knew that Peg Lent had drawn him into the gambling den. The youth felt a chill of horror. Perhaps these banded bush-whackers and scoundrels had caught Old Pete, too. All their hateful activities were centered in the heart and black soul of Peg Lent, who hesitated as he felt something in the young sheller's presence that was different—a challenge and a rebuff, backed by something that somehow made Peg Lent afraid.

"What's achin' yo'?" Peg demanded.

"Where's Old Pete?" Kid asked suddenly.

"I don't know nothin' about him goin' away!" Peg replied with a quick glare to the left.

"Well—pay Jim-Eke the money you robbed him of!"

"Robbed nothin'! He lost it playin' a square——"

From somewhere, Peg somehow missed where, the black muzzle of Kid Shaler's automatic appeared. It fired on the instant, and a man over in the left corner, who had drawn, crumpled down where he sat, his revolver clumping on the floor. It was savage, wonderful shooting. Instantly, the hands of the others went up tentatively, and with reluctance.

"Jim-Eke!" Kid ordered, "get your money back—we've changed the load in the dice!"

Kid had not foreseen this. He had come there to make safe his own trail out of the swamps, or take the consequences of failure, by facing them. Sight of Jim-Eke reminded him of the Summer-long friendship, and the hapless, whipped and dejected appearance of the hill-billy told the story of the loaded dice that had robbed him. Kid knew about those dice.

Jim-Eke came forward hesitatingly. He came up behind Peg, and obeying Kid's orders, took the gambler's three stuffed money-belts from him. A watch fell to the floor from one of the belt loop-pockets. It flung open as it struck the floor. By the face of it Kid knew Old Pete's timepiece.

Peg Lent saw the recognition, and with a yelp went after his own automatic. It was under his arm in a shoulder-holster. Kid seemed slow. As the weapon appeared, however, he shot—once. Peg Lent's right shoulder collapsed at the joint.

Kid Shaler could shoot! The river-rats cringed as they felt the sweep of that smoking pistol-muzzle crossing them restlessly, as it seemed, hungrily. With a gesture, Kid Shaler lined them all up along one side of the shanty-boat, and Jim-Eke crept across to take up Peg Lent's pistols and shoulder-holsters. Then he turned, waiting orders.

They made shell-town tradition that night. Peg Lent and his crew had tricked or robbed the pearlers and shellers for years. Now Kid Shaler and Jim-Eke took back what spoils the scoundrels had on them.

Jim-Eke yanked the money-belts from Peg Lent's body, and unpinned the rolls in the pockets of the river-bandit crew. He took their short-guns, and at a word tossed them through the open stern door where they splashed into the eddy. The shotguns and rifles in the corners were harpooned into the night, where they chugged into the water. They cleaned that river crew!

"That's Old Pete's watch!" Kid whispered, taking up the timepiece. "These scoundrels got him! And here's his money, that Peg Lent took. We'll call all the shellers they robbed and divide up. See—Hobart's red rubber bands on the wads of money? And here's a string off Old Pete's fish-line!"

"Yes, and they worked loaded dice on me in the crap game," Jim-Eke spoke up. "Peg himself done hit—I saw him shift them."

"Well, we've won it all back," Kid declared, his glance wandering over the cowed and cringing pack that quivered and watched as they stood, their teeth and claws all drawn, and their loot taken.

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"Come on, Jim-Eke!" Kid said. "My skiff's astern, there. Start the motor. If any man moves, open on him!"

They backed through the doorway and from the shadow Kid watched while Jim-Eke cleared the skiff and started the outboard motor.

"Swing loose! Take a short circle!" Kid whispered in Jim-Eke's ear, and the hillbilly recognized the ruse as he darted noisily away in the skiff.

Instantly, the gamblers broke from their line up, and two pulled hidden pistols. Kid fired right and left with the two automatics he now had, and with a yell for mercy the gang backed up again.

"Now stay there!" Kid ordered. "We're not through with you yet!"

Then the skiff returned and Kid stepped aboard. A shot was fired from within. Kid was thrown suddenly back, but recovered himself as quickly.

"All right, Kid?" Jim-Eke asked, anxiously.

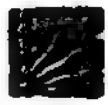
"Guess so—go on!" the Kid answered, a little thickly, and they drove up the eddy.

As they rounded the bend they saw the shadows of the pirates across the windows of the shanty-boats.

At the landing by the railroad bridge, they waited in the gloom, but no one had followed them up the river, and when within an hour a passenger train rolled up, they abandoned the skiff to go to Mendova. There they wrote their shell-bottom addresses on the register of a little hotel.

Jim-Eke turned the key in their room door, and as he did so, heard Kid Shaler fall on one of the two beds. He discovered that his partner was lying back down, with his shirt pulled open. There was a circle of inflamation and blackening skin on the youth's breast, and the home-made, brass steam-pipe match-box on its string showed Peg Lent's truly-aimed bullet sticking in the tough, inbent metal. The force of the steel projectile had been taken up by the brass, but on the cushion of skin and flesh, smashing the muscles and abrading the skin.

Jim-Eke was of the secretive mountain people, who hide shootings, and was handy in the emergencies of the far-away places. He ran the hot water in the wash-bowl till it came steaming hot. Then sopping towels in the flow, he kept them on the injury as hot as he could bear them in his hands. His fingers made sure that neither ribs nor breast-bone were broken. Toward morning, he worked petrolatum and cold cream into the huge bruise, gently massaging the injury. When Kid recovered his consciousness, he smiled his acknowledgment and understanding. Jim-Eke finally crossed the injury with a sunburst of adhesive plaster, and thanks to the hot-water treatment, the blood was finding new channels through and through the contused flesh and what might have been a terrific open wound was now only a wide, huge, healing bruise.



TOWARD morning Kid Shaler noticed and picked up the match-box, to look at it. He unscrewed the top and dragged out some of the paper and silk with which it was stuffed. Jim-Eke had forgotten the pearl, thinking of the injury. Now he tossed a hot towel from hand to hand as the Kid poked away at the projectile, which obstructed the emptying of the tight tube. He turned it upside down, and shook it. Scales and white gritty dust fell upon his palm, like coarse and fine salt from a shaker. The bullet had hit it, plumb center.

"Broken up—busted!" Jim-Eke gasped. "That pearl!"

"Powdered, sure enough!" Kid smiled, with trembling lips and misty eyes. "But it saved my life!"

A sob caught his breath. Jim-Eke made no further comment.

After dawn, when the city was well astir, the two went down to the big restaurant for breakfast. A newsboy pushed the morning papers at them, and the two looked anxiously at the front page. No story of the fight in the gamblers' eddy had found its way to town, for lack of a reporter. But on the last page, Kid Shaler found a paragraph that claimed his attention.

An old man, the paper said, had been brought to town from over on the St. Francis, where he had been found unconscious in a "jon-boat." He had been attacked and robbed. From his papers, it was discovered he had relatives in Ohio, and these on being notified over the long distance telephone had sent word to do the best possible for him. The doctors thought that Old Pete, as he called himself, would recover.

"Old Pete!" Jim-Eke cried. "We'll go see that man!"

It was Old Pete. He was in bed. He had

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been shot, but would live, they were certain now.

"Howdy, boys!" he greeted them. "I thought you'd tripped away for good!"

"No!" the two exclaimed. Jim-Eke added—

"Not when partners need us!"

"They shot me, account of my not telling which way you'd gone with that big pearl they suspicions!" the wounded man said. "And then they robbed me clean."

"Well, here's your money all back," Kid replied. "We met up with those pirates afterwards."

"But that awful pearl, sonny!"

"It's busted up, some!"

Kid showed the ruin, with the bullet lying in the punctured and dimpled brass, powdered with the lime.

"What—that pearl ruined!" Old Pete whispered, and Jim-Eke choked.

"That's mean luck, wa'n't hit?" the hillbilly added. "All that money gone!"

"And I was shot on account of it," Old Pete mused, "but my folks have telegraphed they were coming, wife and children. I can't feel bad!"

"And my lawyer says they caught the man who did that murder they said I did," Jim-Eke cried, with feeling.

"I telephoned my father—a thousand miles!" Kid Shaler announced. "He and mother—they want me home again, and I'm going."

"And we suspicioned that pearl!" Old Pete said. "Why, boys, it brought us good luck! Yes, sir! I believe it did!"

"Hit's so!" Jim-Eke repeated.

"Probably!" Kid Shaler said. "Pearls sure are curious, mighty curious!"

GOOD GUN WHILE IT LASTED

by C. B. Watson

IN 1858 the Santa Cruz valley, Arizona, was a barren waste, due to the repeated raids of the Apaches. That the people had clung tenaciously to their homes for a while was shown by the grave-boards scattered through the valley, invariably bearing the inscription, after the deceased's name—

KILLED BY THE APACHES

Ranches were ruined, *haciendas* were deserted, fields had been untilled for several years. The old mission of San José de Tumaccarri, beautifully situated on the slope four miles below Tubac, was but little better than a mass of ruins. A garrison at Fort Buchanan, at the head of the Sonoita valley, attempted to hold the savages in check.

One of those who would not be driven out of the country by the Indians was Sylvester Mowrey, one of the first Americans to settle there. He rediscovered the Patagonia silver mine in 1856. He found it about ten miles from the Sonora line in the Santa Cruz mountains, some six thousand feet above the sea-level. It was worked by the Spaniards in 1760, and abandoned by them in 1820 because of Apache activities.

If there was one man in southern Arizona whom the Apaches feared it was Mr. Mowrey, and this not because he had hunted them. Their fear was due entirely to a 6,000 pound boiler Mr. Mowrey had imported from Lavaca, Texas, many hundred miles, and hauled all the way by mules. For any freight to make laboriously its way such a long distance and through a country harassed by Comanche, Kiowa, and Apache, and not be subject to an early attack was an unheard of experience. Yet the explanation was simple enough. The Indians believed the boiler was a gigantic cannon, the like of which had never been dreamed of by red minds.

Its appearance terrified the savages. Surely it was long and big enough to shoot them off the top of mountains. They kept far from it. The few men accompanying it were as safe, if not safer, than the ordinary train under an escort of cavalry. Mr. Mowrey had no trouble while installing his steam engine and boiler. But after the boiler was concealed from view in the mine building the Apaches decided no gun was dangerous that was in a house or under ground; and they promptly raided the mine, murdered the superintendent and several of the miners, destroyed the buildings and drove off the stock. Had the boiler been left outside the savages doubtless would have continued to fear it.

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THE LADDERS OF DEATH

A Complete Novelette

by Georges Surdez

Author of "The Angel-Maker," "Outside the Walls," etc.

THE rain beat on the glass panes with tiny, multiplied crunching sounds as the tapping fingers of a ghostly hand. From ahead, dulled by the shower, came the panting of the locomotive, struggling to draw the toy-like train up the slope.

In the vague glow of the weeping twilight, the hills of the lower Jura, covered with firpines, loomed formidable. The sky that curved above, as if crushing down the damp scenery beneath its leaden canopy, was a grayish-blue, threatening, ominous. It would have been no surprize to the beholder to see a squadron of broom-riding witches sweep across that sky, borne by the wind.

The train was of the narrow gage type, nicknamed by the people of the vicinity "Le Taco," "The Rattler." It ran between the town of Morteau and the mountain village of Harquemont. The region is the easternmost belt of France, adjoining Switzerland. The country, a maze of lower mountains, is the same rugged mystical land that radiates about the Alps. The inhabitants, hybrid of many races, from the Sequesnian Gauls of antiquity to the Alsatians emigrated from France's lost provinces to escape German rule, have been unified by their surroundings—a strong, hardy breed, with iron-tempered souls, superstitious, brave, fanatical in beliefs and disbeliefs.

In the bad light of the failing day, the occupants of the coach detached themselves as darker blotches on the all-pervading gray that hung like a fog from floor to ceiling. The smell of stale meat rose from the greasy papers scattered about by the travelers after their four o'clock meal. The smoke from cheap cigarets and cheaper cigars, and from pipes, blended with the smell of kerosene from the oil-lamp in its brass bracket. The reek of unclean human bodies crowded close, of damp clothing, added to the mephitic atmosphere. In a corner, a drunkard, returning home from a country fair, was sleeping, snoring noisily, and exhaling wine fumes that ran as a recurrent motive through the orgy of smells.

The wheels rattled over the fish-plates. The loose window-panes jangled at each shock, and the steady shuffling of heavy-shod feet formed an unreal tumult. The warmth within was as depressing as the cold downpour without.

"Rotten weather!" some one remarked in the semi-obscurity.

Grunts of derision, of approval, mocking exclamations fused on all sides.

"You said it!"

"Worse than ——!"

"How did you guess?"

Then some one pointed out—

"What d'you expect, this time of the year?"

Silence.

Charles Lemac firmly braced against the back of the seat, one foot thrust against the rest before him, had become dizzy in the fetid car. He reached for the leather strap and released the window. A breath of damp cold air swept through Lemac; his lungs were caressed by the vivifying oxygen, and he was conscious of a clearing in his

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brain. Unused to the confinement within walls, he felt less lonesome with the wind from the hills. But protest soon went up.

"We'll all get pneumonia—shut that window——"

And Lemac obeyed. Some one relighted a pipe, and the ruddy glow of the match illuminated for a brief instant, a red, coarse peasant face, jutting above a blue blouse.

"Pigs are high this year," the fellow said.

"Speaking of pigs—did you hear about the customs officer—that clever fellow?"

Lemac smiled with a touch of bitterness. He knew the feeling against men of his calling. In the dark the speaker did not see his blue uniform with the silver braid on the cuffs. Or, perhaps he had seen, and, trusting to the obscurity to hide his identity, had taken occasion to give one of the law's clan his opinion.

"Found him tied up to a tree near the border this morning," the speaker went on. "He said that four or five men materialized out of the fog and pounced on him. He saw with his own eyes the entrance of a lot of merchandise. Claims, he does, that there were at least twenty men in the party."

"Ah, ha!" laughed another. "It'll take more men than the Government can send, to stop smuggling."

"Yes—" A note of agreement was sounded. "The authorities should take more pains to arrest assassins and burglars in the big cities, and less to hinder men earning a little money bringing in undeclared goods."

"Taxes and duties are the poor man's burden," a raucous tongue announced. "Only the rich go scatheless. If they want to keep up an army and navy to protect wealth, why don't the fellows who need protection pay for it?"

"That's anarchism, Martin."

"No," was the sententious reply. "That's common sense."

Yes, thought Lemac, according to these primitive men.

Ever since the frontiers had been established and duties levied on imports, men had made a profession of avoiding these duties. The part of Switzerland adjoining, commonly called the Franches-Montagnes* District, had been a part of France until 1815, within memory of some of the oldest inhabitants. By the treaty of Vienna, it was put under Swiss rule. The people there had coffee, matches, sugar, cocoa, flour, tobacco at a cheaper price, ranging from a third to nearly half. The inhabitants of the part still French, envious of their neighbors, could not comprehend why they should pay the increased rates.

The act of smuggling, considered a crime by law, was a meritorious thing in the eyes of the people. Not a farmer but would lie himself blue in the face to shield a smuggler and his wares in his attic. Even the policemen patroling the district had been gained somewhat to the belief, and willingly smoked cigars known to have been brought in without the formality of duty.

"There's talk of bringing in outsiders, customs men from the German frontier," the revolutionary speaker continued. "Well, they'll get a warm reception when they come. We are not reputed good shots for nothing. And before today, 'Gabelous' have been found dead, where they had no business to be alive."

"Gabelous," an old nickname given the officers a hundred and twenty years before! There had been a tax on salt. The men assigned to the task of collecting were called Gabelous, because the tax was named "Gabelle." The name had remained even after its reason for being had disappeared, and was now a brand of hatred.

The raids of the smugglers had grown in size and frequency within the last year. The audacity of the *coups* had staggered the forces of the law. Watches from the near-by Swiss cities were appearing on the French market and it was easy, by a comparison with import figures, to see that a leakage existed somewhere. Silk from Basle and lace from Saint Gall also came in by the same underground route. The formerly popular road via the Lake of Geneva had been practically abandoned, the crossing being easier in the mountainous country, cut with numerous gorges and gullies of the Doubs Valley.

The Doubs is a distant tributary of the Rhone. Over four hundred miles long, the point of its source is some sixty miles from Verdun, where it merges into the Saone. For a distance of some twenty-five miles, it forms the frontier between the Swiss Confederation and France. Through the ages, the river has cut for itself a bed in the rocky soil. Along the border it flows

* Free-mountains.

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between two high ranges of hills, a beautiful silver stream trickling through a mass of green vegetation. Its somber beauties, the delight of tourists, held nothing but menace to the customs men sent there to patrol.

Lemac, while serving in the army, had been stationed at one time in the region, and realized the task he faced. Upon him now rested the responsibility. A man with a record, he had been picked out of many others, given full power. How would he come out? The enmity of the population was evident. The customs service of the place was demoralized by numerous checks. No doubt some master-brain, well informed, daring, commanded the smugglers, who at last seemed unified. The usual anonymous letters of former days, giving away expeditions, were not prevalent. The officers struggled as it were, in the dark. And with a small force, not much could be done.

"How long is it," asked a quiet, level voice, "since a customs man has been killed?"

"Eight months," was the instant reply. "But it's because they have kept out of the way."

This conversation in the dark annoyed Lemac. Things in the light are never as formidable.

He was relieved when the conductor came in, scratched a match and lighted the lamp. The flame rose, flickered, and the wick instantly began to smoke, while the vacillating yellow light struggled to pierce the hazy air. With each bump the lamp shifted, and gave the faces of the occupants weird, ferocious expressions.

"Doesn't sound like a government match!" some one jokingly addressed the conductor.

"It's not," the man replied.

Typical, thought Lemac, this frank admission of smuggled goods. Puerile as that match seemed, still it was a component part of the system that cheated the customs.

There was a long silence, each man peering into the face of his neighbor. Lemac, in his corner, went unseen for some minutes.

In the light, he proved to be a man of short stature. But the heavy broadcloth uniform hung stiffly upon his frame, as if his body had been hewn out of solid rock. He gave a first impression of ruthless strength, of gigantic, indomitable resolution. There was about him the compactness of a cartridge of dynamite. A man who could flare to the most tremendous exertion, from inertia. His face, bronzed and clean-cut, was keen. His green-blue eyes, cold, metallic, hard, were roving and alert. A detail once noted was never forgotten. And this photographic eye now took stock of his unsuspecting companions.

The man called Martin, he with the raucous voice, was evidently the tall middle-aged peasant, with a face of tanned buckskin and muddy eyes with red rims. Gnarled hands clutched the pommel of a heavy cane, iron tipped to one fourth of its length, terminating in a sharp spike, a weapon, as well as a useful instrument for hill-climbing. The man of the level voice was evidently of better breeding. He wore good clothing cut approximately according to the prevailing style. His face was round and pink, and a short silky blond mustache adorned his upper lip. His profession, from the genteel manner and careful speech, was apparent—a school-teacher, thought Lemac.

He was right, for soon, the peasant addressed him as professor, with a note of irony in his tone. Ignorance has always been scornful of knowledge.

"And you, professor," he said, "being in government pay, what do you think of smuggling?"

"That it's a poor spirit for Frenchmen not to be willing to pay their lawful taxes."

"Because the taxes pay you," the other pointed out. "Do you realize you're only a mouthpiece of the Government? That you were taught to parrot what they wanted the people to believe. You take our kids to school, beat into their head the principle of money supremacy, tell them that the Government can do no wrong. Ah, what would we come to if they believed you!"

"They might be happier," the schoolmaster said evenly. "Happiness is not a matter of possession. If they were content they would be happy. You would make our task easier if you would refrain from talking lightly of illegal matters before our pupils."

"That's the Prussian system," denounced Martin. "I may not know the alphabet, but I know that those who pay you are

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trying to knock all common sense, all sense of justice out of us, all the independence we have attained through years."

"You are not speaking your own thoughts, Martin," the young man reproved. "You parrot the words of the agitators who make fiery speeches in the cities, cause strikes and disturbances. And when trouble really breaks out do you see them facing the police? No, they're safe in another town. And if the truth were known you'd see that they receive foreign money to disturb France."

"There you go, professor!" the peasant laughed. "Next we'll hear about the bogey over the Rhine that's gnawing at the vital organs of France, before moving in to take it over."

"When trouble breaks out in French factories, when French smugglers shoot down French customs men, you can believe that they laugh behind the Rhine—and wait. And it's you and your son who will pay—pay with blood."

"You mean that a little smuggling can affect the national situation?" the other scorned.

"Yes. A tiny sore on the foot will take away a man's ability to perform his best. And smuggling, law-breaking in general, if approved by respectable citizens, is a sore on the nation."

The school-teacher said this with such conviction that the others looked up, and several muttered approval. Lemac felt his heart warm toward the young man. At least there was one present who thought things out, and saw further than the apparent injustice.

"Say, professor," the older man suddenly spoke up. "Don't get the idea we wouldn't fight if the Prussians came again. I'm old, but I'd shoulder a gun. And my son, Paul, is in the reserve of the army. He'd go the third day of mobilization. So, as long as we're willing to die for France, I don't see why it's a crime to get our coffee and sugar a few sous cheaper."

"You don't understand——"

"As for smuggling, I hear that the Government is not adverse to smuggling arms for blacks to use against white men in Africa."

"And England, who punishes smuggling with prison when she herself is cheated, considers valid a contract to cheat some other nation out of her stipulated duties. I know all this. But the matter is too complex to analyze. We should do right in our own little circle, and let the world in general take care of itself."

"In other words, live for ourselves, eh?"

"Exactly."

"Well, that's what we do when we use smuggled goods—live for ourselves," concluded the peasant with a laugh.

At this point the slumbering drunkard awoke. He sat across from Lemac, and his first vision was the gleaming buttons and blue uniform. His face changed ludicrously. He stared for a few seconds, then snorted. The others turned, and saw the customs man. Lemac lighted the cigar he had been chewing, his hand as steady as marble.

There was an inaudible gasp. He had entered the train last and taken a seat by the door. The conductor had punched his ticket absent-mindedly. It was evidently the first hint that the enemy was in their midst. Lemac bore the glances without flinching, half-shut his eyes in an affectation of solid comfort, and smiled lazily.

There was an exchange of looks, then, as if snapped by an invisible common mechanism, all heads turned away, and the conversation returned to the original subject—the price of pigs.

The drunkard, braver, or less capable of discretion, staggered to his feet, stood swaying in the aisle, looking from the neatly polished boots to the braided cap.

"Ah," he said, then paused for inspiration. "Ah—" he resumed. "You, spying on us, eh? Well, well, we'll show you things you never saw in your home town, young fellow!"

Lemac grinned pleasantly and inclined his head. At a loss, the drunken man slithered back in his place, and his stentorian breathing resumed cadence.

"Harquemont—Harquemont!" from the conductor.

The lights of the village were sliding nearer. With asthmatic coughs the engine came to a stop, the cars collided noisily, a clang of tortured metal rent the air. The conductor shook the sleeper. Others in the car got up.

Lemac descended the steps, grasping his bags in a sinewy hand.

The night was now black as a pocket. The glaring window of the café blinked some distance away. The dark was still oozing moisture. There was an exchange

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of good-bys, and shuffling of feet. A knot of men hesitated some distance from the customs man. Lemac discerned Martin towering above the others. In spite of the peasant's revolutionary tendencies, there were strong man qualities that appealed to Lemac.

As he strode away, some one from the group, called out—

"Hey—*monsieur!*"

He turned in answer.

"Be careful, or maybe some one'll bite you!"

Lemac laughed silently. The muscles of his cheeks twitched in a nervous contraction peculiar to himself. He went on, without replying, in the direction of the lights.

Then suddenly he turned and called back—

"Maybe that some one will break teeth!"

CHAPTER II

THE huge kerosene-lamp depending from the ceiling, the rounded bowl inserted snugly in the iron hoop hung by chains, shining as an antique vase, cast mellow light in great yellow sheets on the lead-inserted windows of the café. In the corners, from the beams, tresses of drying onions, swung. And, a wise precaution, a signboard was nailed up where all could see. A dead rooster, underneath the legend—

Credit is dead—poor debtors have killed it.

The host, Muller, a thick-necked, bullet-headed fellow, was as hospitable as his sign. From behind the huge zinc-covered counter, where he presided as a strange priest of this temple of Bacchus, he glowered his enmity upon the world. His red face now and then split into a grin, when the silver pieces slid across the board. When making change, his fingers clutched regretfully, talon-like, at the grimy coins. His eyes peered malevolently from beneath bushy eyebrows, as if taking stock of the cash value of everything in sight. All the man was there—greed.

His arms, similar to hewn pieces of beef, were moved from time to time to the labeled bottles on the shelf. He drew down the *Eau de Vie de Marc*, the Anisette, or the plain "*goutte*," the gut-twister at two sous a shot. Though late in the evening, some of the patrons were still indulging in absinthe, the "green fairy" that holds the portals to that land where each man is king.

Arranged neatly, the liquid measures of pewter glinted dully on their hooks, and rattled when his huge back brushed across them. It was queer to see the fingers that logically belonged on an executioner's fists handling the tiny glasses of distilled joy. From time to time, he yawned cavernously, with a heave that shook his whole fat-laden frame.

Young Paul Martin, as he entered, contemplated the owner in silence, for a brief minute, then rapidly crossed the room, answering with a light gesture the greetings fired at him from all sides. He brought himself to a stop with a half-skip, as if so fired with energy he must needs constrain himself with effort. He leaned his great body on the zinc, regardless of the sticky remnants of liquor spilled on the grayish surface. His pink, healthy complexion and blond hair, contrasted with the dark crop and sallow skin of Muller.

"Well?" questioned the owner.

"I walked over to Maiche today and questioned many people. The customs men are not materializing. I guess the smugglers can sleep on both ears," the young man ended with a short laugh.

"I guess they can," agreed Muller. "What'll you have?"

"As usual," replied Martin.

The other filled the squat glass, holding perhaps a half-pint, with the violet-red fluid of plain wine, and Martin told in detail of his excursion to the nearest village of importance. Even the mounted policemen there had no news. He, Martin, having served in the army for a long time, was friendly enough with these two ex-troopers to be able to draw them out.

"Glad there's nothing to it," Muller said. "I was worrying."

"Don't worry," Martin put in. "As long as the officers are men we've been seeing around daily, it will be all right. But let new faces beware."

He moved to a table and immediately became absorbed in *manille*, the French national card-game.

In a corner, several men were singing the "Internationale," bawling at the top of their lungs. The singers were the dissatisfied element, those who always begged

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for drinks, and coincidentally, so it appeared, those who never worked. One of them, evidently inspired, rose to his feet, and started a long denunciation of the general state of things. The down-trodden workmen were being worked to death, while their children were starving and clotheless. Some one remarked that from the speaker's appearance, he was in need of nothing. There was a general laugh. But the man went on. Even the card-players desisted momentarily to listen to the speech.

"Is it right that the sons of men with money should own you, body and soul? Is it right that while you serve your two years as troopers, they should be sent to military school, and give you orders, and wear gold lace? Is it right that every soft berth in the Administration should go to those who came into this world with a spoon of gold between their teeth? No——"

He tapped a dirty finger on a folded sheet.

"I have here a newspaper. And do you know what I read there, written by a companion? He saw a common sailor pushing a broom around the deck of a battleship, with a gold-braided fool giving him instructions. Beat that!"

"And how would you right things?" a heckler remarked. "By having the gold-braided one push the broom, and the broom-pusher that was, give orders?"

"No. There is the ideal of a navy where each man in turn would be in command. Where the broom-shover of one day would be captain the next——"

He was interrupted by an outburst of laughter.

"And the conscript in his turn would replace the old general for a few hours!" some one scoffed.

"Fools, who won't see! What is the army but a recruiting school for policemen, customs officers, forest guards, for the armed guard of the plutocrat?"

"You don't say——"

"Yes! I hate them all—the soldiers, some for their stupidity, some for their meanness and brutality. I forgive the poor private who knows no better. But as for the officers and non-coms.—those sword draggers——"

He did not finish. Martin had leaped from his chair, hurtled his great frame across the room, and had him by the collar. His hand, wide open, struck on the rounded bloodshot cheek.

"Repeat that," the young man challenged.

"I didn't know you were here, African," apologized the enthusiast, cringingly, freeing himself.

"Forget it, African," mumbled Muller, who had come over to quell the prospective riot, clutching an empty bottle in each fist. "He's drunk."

Martin regained his place, and picked up his cards with trembling fingers. He was known everywhere as "The African" because he had served several years in the French Colonies. Following—all unconsciously—the example of the Romans, the inhabitants of Harquemont named their outstanding soldier after his campaigns.

"So," remarked one of Martin's fellow players, "you don't believe that being a policeman or customs man is the result of army training."

"There's a law that says any man wishing to enter such Government service must have served in the army up to the rank of sergeant. So that with many, being a non-com. is a stepping-stone. It is incidental to the rest of their career. Many of them do, as I have done, come back and work like other folks."

"Ah——"

"Yes, many of us, though, when the time comes to leave the army are tempted by the thought of a nice little job in the open air, with a spice of danger. Yes, the love of danger gets in a man's blood. I understand— Speaking about danger and a non-com., I remember once——"

He paused reminiscently, rolled a cigaret and lighted it.

The others looked at each other. The African had the trait common to ex-soldiers, a weakness concerning narration, lengthy and detailed of his exploits while wearing the uniform.

But Martin began:

"It was when my company was transferred to Ain Kesbat, in southern Morocco. The French had entered recently, and the natives, the fiercest Arabs you've ever laid eyes on, were giving us ——. Ain Kesbat squats by a pool, rimmed around with graceful date-palms. The little white houses cluster around it as though they're cold—which they're not. For unrelieved heat, pick that spot. The sky is blue, a

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clear hard blue like a steel blade, so blue that it's white.

"The Government was building a telegraph station there. A sheik was hanging around with a mob of cutthroats, Mohammed Ben Abdallah, to give his name. He was more than a chief, he was a regular god to them. But even special help from heaven could not have taught him to handle his troops the way he did.

"An order came from Fez to the effect that if the man was not captured, his men properly dusted, his *douars* cleaned up, the captain, who was a good sort of old man, named Janin, would have news that would retard his digestion. It was foolish to send us infantry against mounted natives. But that's the way things go."

"We set out from Ain Kesbat. All the officers save the captain had something or other the matter with them. Pure bad luck. So that Janin, myself and another fellow, a non-com., too, were the only white men with the outfit. We had Senegalese sharp-shooters under our orders, negroes from Dakar and vicinity. These *tirailleurs* were good soldiers in their own country but they had only recently arrived, so they felt strange, in fact were deadly scared. Never having had the Arabs at their bayonets' end they endowed them with superhuman ability.

"The sun was boiling hot, the sand got into our shoes and, even through the helmet, the heat felt as though it were cooking the brain. We had native guides, more than likely hand in glove with the very fellows we were looking for. Villages claimed to be within an easy day's march couldn't be got to under forty hours. Those miles stretched like rubber. And when we reached the villages, they would be empty.

"Wells said to be full, turned out to be mud puddles, preferably with a dead camel jutting his four stiff legs in the middle. At night we shook from fright was well as cold."

Martin looked at his listeners, who had forgotten their impatience, for this was a new story. He went on:

"You can't know what a queer feeling it gives you, when you go to relieve a sentry and find him with his bowels on the ground. One chap, who wasn't quite dead, claimed that a bush had crawled up and stabbed him. Of course those fellows tied bundles of foliage on their backs and got near that way. See?"

The others nodded.

"We couldn't find Mr. Mohammed anywhere. So the captain said we should go back, and we turned around. We followed a *wadi*, the dried course of a river, until we reached an open plain, where there was a *shott*. A *shott?* That's a salt pool. This particular pool glistened like a mirror, spilled the light of the noon-day sun in your eyes, almost blinded you. The air was that thick we thought we were breathing in hot mush.

"We found the warriors at last. They were barring our way to Ain Kesbat, like the clever dogs they were. Hundreds of them, on horseback. We fired into them and thought they'd beat it, as they always did. But not they.

"We charged them—they opened fire, wounding seven men. And—they didn't wait for us to get at them with the bayonet, they didn't. They withdrew a few hundred yards and, this beats all, but it's true, they protected the slight retreat by groups of riflemen, placed *en echelon* so as to support each other.

"We drew into skirmish line, the natives did the same, and we sat there, in the sun. According to our experience, the Moroccans should have lost patience after twenty minutes, lost many men in a rush, and then disappeared. These fellows were different. They departed from custom. From eight until nine we thought they were joking. From nine to ten we thought they were silly to keep us waiting so long. From ten to eleven, we began to realize the truth. At twelve, with the water going fast and the sun becoming hotter by the minute, we were sure that we were in for it.

"You'll say that the captain should have known better. Maybe. But you mustn't forget that the poor fellow had learned in training schools that untrained troops will always attack first. I had been with him in Algeria, in the Sudan, and it had always held true. Four hours was a short time to unlearn what had taken years to learn.

"I was rolling a cigaret, and when I struck the match, the sulfur made me cough. You know what them Government matches are. I raised myself a little to sneeze, and—*pssh*—a whistle, like that of a blackbird. I knew the sound of the bullets from the native pieces, a rustle, as though a thick

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piece of paper were torn. This was different. It sang soft, vibrant—from a Mauser or a Lebel.

"Well, we stewed the whole afternoon. Night came quickly, like it does down there. We knew there'd be no night attack. Why in —— should they risk losing men when they knew they could nab us from hunger and thirst in a few hours? The captain had dug a hole in the ground, where he sat. He had a map out, and a lantern. We two non-coms, hung around, not saying much, but thinking a lot.

"He said to us, 'Well, boys, we're in a mess.' And we said 'Yes,' because there was no kicking, we were. 'We must get out,' he said after that. Again we said, 'Yes.'

" 'It's a tough job,' he went on, 'but it's got to be done'." We nodded, and waited. He thought for some minutes. His face was baked red like a tomato, and all wrinkled up. Said his eyes hurt from the sun. I think he had been crying a little, because he liked us, and it was partly his fault. Good man, he was——"

"He must have been," some one agreed.

"You bet he was," Martin reiterated. "Well, he stayed there, breathing loud, like a horse with the heaves. I remember noticing his three stripes in the lantern-light, and thinking that it didn't make much difference whether you're an officer or not. When a man's dead, he's dead. 'Did you notice they have modern weapons?' he asked. Had we? We hadn't noticed anything but that all day. 'And the men are shaky,' he said further. 'Captain,' I replied, 'when you see a man hit in the neck, and running around in a circle squirting blood, like a chicken with his head cut off, that shakes you.' He agreed.

' He got a cigar from his pocket, then as if an afterthought, passed us each one. We lighted up, and felt a little better. 'And you saw, too, that every time they rush, some one stops them. They fight as though they have a commander?' 'Yes,' we both said. 'Smacks more than a little of the European,' he went on. 'Maybe there's some truth in the rumor that our neighbors over the Rhine are sending down instructors on the quiet.' The other non-com. piped up: 'I'm sure of it, captain, I saw their leader out there. He has riding-boots on.' I said, 'I saw him, too, and tried to get him. But straight shooting at eight hundred meters isn't easy in this glare.' 'I saw him, too,' Janin said. 'That's why I spoke.'

"We shut up for a while. Though it was already dark on the ground the sky was still changing color. You ought to see an African sunset. The sky first changes from blue to violet. Great streaks of crimson suddenly appear, cascading down all the colors to orange, with thin green stripes, near the edge. Through the tears in the clouds shows golden light, little darting shafts, just as they show about angels in pictures. It glimmers for a while. The ground seems to sigh, and wind comes from the south, and it sort of seems to wipe the heavens clear of light. Then the first star comes out, and over the top of the dunes the red glow from the Arabs' fires. We could hear them sing and laugh. Then everything was dark, though the sky was still unbelievably clear, as though a curtain of blue velvet studded with gold nails——"

"Could you think of the sky when you thought you were gone?"

"That's when a man looks at it most, when he don't know if he'll ever see it again," Martin replied simply.

He busied himself rolling and lighting another cigaret. In this interval, others from near-by tables, drew their chairs nearer, and even Muller came forward, though perhaps to see that none sneaked a drink while the general attention was given to the narrator.

"When everything was dark as the inside of a negro's belly, the captain spoke up. 'I want to ask a favor,' he said. Of course we said, 'yes.' 'Our only chance is to get that fellow, whether his name is Mohammed or Von something or other. I'd ask some of the *tirailleurs* to do this, only they're nervous. The man may be white, it's better that white men should do it. You know the way they crawl into our lines? Well, you two would have to go into their camp that way, and get that man, alive if you can. If not—' he stopped.

" 'I'll go, captain,' I said. The other chap said the same. There was no use waiting longer, so we took off everything except our pants and shirts, took each a revolver and bayonet. We wouldn't need the rest if we didn't come back. 'Good by and good luck,' the captain said. 'I'll move down with the company, and if I hear shooting I'll come. Even if you fail there's some

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chance we may get away in the confusion.'

"I don't know why, but I let the other fellow lead. Maybe because, when I spoke of failing, he said, 'I never fail,' shortly like that. We walked, crouched, until we were near the Moroccan lines, then started crawling like snakes. The first sentry did not see us in time, and never saw anybody afterward. That little fellow with me, jumped on him, and he never said 'boo.'

"We were wondering how we'd locate our man in that bunch around the fire. 'Do you think he's asleep?' I asked in a whisper. 'No,' the other said. 'If he's any good he's out inspecting the outposts.' We crawled aimlessly about. Then, not thirty feet away, a tiny flame suddenly appeared, flickered, went out. 'That's him,' my friend said coolly. 'How do you know?' I asked. 'The natives have no matches. It's him—and Mohammed ain't an Arab, either.' The fellow was walking toward the outposts. I heard his heels click, and the Arabs don't wear shoes with spurs.

"He stopped again to relight. In the flame we could see his face—a broad forehead, long nose, thick jaws, upturned mustaches He was what we were after. My friend rose, revolver in hand, when we got close, and shoved the muzzle against his back. 'Don't move—don't cry out,' he said softly. The other, I must say, had nerves of iron. He did not even try to turn around. He just spoke. 'Very well, I'll go—' 'Give the word if we're challenged,' my friend warned. 'All right,' he answered.

"I had made no noise, I had not spoken. That's why 'Mohammed' thought there was only one man behind him. All of a sudden, he howled out as loud as he could, turned around and knocked my friend flat. I leaped for him. The fellow was as strong as three men. I am not weak, as you know, but he had me. I thought of all it meant to us if he got away. I had the bayonet in my hands, and I struck at him many times. Something warm squirted over my hands, ran down on my thighs. I could feel the wet through the trousers. Then, he grew heavy, rested on me—shut up. 'He's dead,' I muttered to my comrade, who had regained his feet. 'I know, he replied, 'Let's run.'

"That was wise. We ran. But everybody was shooting in our direction. I felt a rap against my hip, and fell forward. It didn't hurt at first. My friend stopped. 'I'm hit,' I said. 'Get out of it, yourself.' He laughed, and only exclaimed, 'Oh—' Then he put his hands under me and lifted me up. I am way heavier then he ever could be, and much taller. But he was so strong that he ran with me as though I had been a kid. 'Drop me and get out,' I kept saying. He said nothing—saved his breath.

"'This way! This way!' the captain was yelling. The troopers were firing. Then Janin must have told the bugler to sound the charge. I tell you, it made an impression on me, that bugle screaming in the dark. Without their leader the Moroccans were nothing. They ran, leaving all their tents, the baggage and a lot of horses.

"By daylight, all was over. The way to Ain Kesbat was clear. We buried Mohammed. Janin looked into his map-case and found his real name. He took one of the rifles left by the Arabs, planted it instead of a cross, and engraved something on it."

"What?" asked a curious listener.

"'Hauptmann Otto Von Hutter, Fifth Prussian Infantry.' He also wrote something else in German that looked like this——"

Martin drew a sheet of paper, a stub of paper, and wrote, 'Für Vaterland Gefalen.'

"That means, 'Fallen for his country,'" translated Muller.

"I guess he did at that," Martin agreed, thoughtfully.

"And what has that got to do with what that fellow was bellowing a little while ago?"

"That a man who risks his life for a friend is a man, whether he is a non-com.—" Martin's eyes flickered toward the door, and his face changed— "or—becomes a customs man after he leaves the service."

"How do we know that tale wasn't made to prove your point?" a scoffer remarked.

"There's a scar on my hip if you want to look at it, and—" Martin paused, and deliberately turned to face the customs officer who had just entered. "And, by Heaven!" he exclaimed. "Talk of the ——, there he is, Lemac, the fellow who pulled me out!"

Lemac had evidently heard the last of the narrative, for he showed no surprize, except the first startled recognition. There was a confused murmur. Lemac smilingly answered the greeting. Martin, looked about him, saw all the curious faces, the

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antagonism written there. He felt a quick longing to be alone with his friend, to talk over old times.

"Come over to our place," he invited.

Lemac nodded.

As they turned to go Muller came forward, almost as if he were about to speak, to object. But he caught a quick look in Paul Martin's eyes, and he turned away.

The others in the café heard Muller mutter something under his breath.

"He ain't a friend for Paul Martin to have," some one said shortly. "Him being a customs officer——"

CHAPTER III

MOUNTAIN communities retire early, and many of the houses were already darkened. In the distance, the puffing of the train going on toward Maiche could be heard. Where the lights were still up, tiny drops of rain were illuminated. Lemac had left his baggage with Muller, as there was no customs post in the village, and he intended stopping at Muller's inn.

Paul Martin continued to exclaim over the meeting.

At one time, Martin and Lemac had occupied the same white-washed room in the infantry barracks, at Dakar. They had been more than friends, closer than brothers. Their lives had been identical. Together they had haunted the ramshackle music-hall, applauded the same painted, cheap singers, strode through the public garden on stifling hot nights, listening to the band.

They had been discharged together, had come up from Africa to Marseilles in the same cabin. Then they had separated. There had been no exchange of addresses. For one thing, Lemac did not know exactly what he was going to do, being undecided whether to enter one of the services opened to him by his army rank, or to re-enlist. Martin had said that he was going back to the farm, that his father was waiting for him there. Lemac had vaguely been aware that his friend's home was in the Jura Mountains, but had not known the exact location.

Strange? Not at all. Friendship between strong men demands no letter-writing, no continuation. When the two men meet again, if they do, there is a brief greeting, a hand-clasp and short inquiries. Curiosity about each detail of a friend's life is typically feminine.

They came to Martin's home, a solid stone house near the end of the village, on the first wooded hill. They passed through a courtyard, skirted the dung heap which is a part of every orderly French farmhouse, and Paul shoved open the door.

His father had arrived but a few minutes before. After the elder Martin had recovered from his first astonishment he seemed abashed that his son's friend should have been the traveling companion of so short a time ago.

"M'sieu Lemac," he faltered. "You mustn't take too seriously what I talk on the train. I did it mostly to tease the school-teacher, who is an ardent patriot."

"Don't worry, Monsieur Martin," Lemac reassured him. "We know your breed—the kind of fathers who have kids like Paul. Socialists who are really conservative. And there's some justice in what you said——"

"Ain't there!" rejoiced the old man.

In the train, in the dim light, he had appeared scarcely more than forty. But under the close glare of the lamp, his age showed. He must be sixty or close to it. Wonderful men, these mountaineers. Old Martin's frame still showed great strength.

"Sit down, Lemac," Paul Martin said.

Lemac sank into a chair and for the first time looked about the living-room which was also dining-room and kitchen. Huge furniture of dark oak, an immense table upon which was tacked an oil cloth to serve as linen. On this some greasy dishes, and a kerosene lamp. Martin's first move, on entering, had been to raise the wick. The light now revealed a beam ceiling and narrow window. A huge cast-iron stove rumbled in a corner, and kitchen utensils depended from hooks.

Lemac recalled that Martin had told him his mother was dead.

Paul brought out the traditional bottle of wine and filled three pewter goblets.

"Here's luck!"

The metal containers clicked as they touched. Old Martin, still amazed, breathed loudly. His son smiled, his joy evident. Lemac contemplated the scene and felt an immense longing for a home, for friends. His sense of companionship had been blunted by many lonely months.

"How do you like our *guitoune?*" questioned Paul.

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Lemac started, at the once familiar appelation for "quarters." He answered in the queer half-Arab slang of the colonial army, and lighted a cigar. For the first time in many months, he felt happy. He felt the crushing responsibility of his post dwindling into the background of his thoughts.

Gorgeous days were evoked, days of battle, days of pleasure. A certain expedition up in the Guineas, accompanied by a coughing old gunboat, under command of a gouty captain, caused laughter in retrospect.

"Those were the good old days," tritely remarked Lemac.

"And here's to the *moukeres!*" offered Paul, toasting to the ladies of the colonies.

"Good luck to them," assented Lemac.

"And praise them, for women who never cause trouble," Paul added.

Old Martin gave a hoarse laugh.

"Hear him!" he said. "He's to be married in a few weeks and he pretends to hate women."

"Congratulations, old man," offered Lemac.

"This place needs a housekeeper," Martin explained.

"And you want Marie, eh?" the father chimed in. "He pretends it's a business proposition, but he's so jealous he wants to strangle the cheese buyer for speaking to her."

"Purely business again," Paul pointed out.

The conversation turned to the main business of the Martins', the prosaic manufacture of cheese. Paul, in brief, self-mocking phrases told of the manner of dealing with buyers. After the tenseness of the afternoon, this commonplace subject relaxed Lemac, who sprawled more and more in his chair, joked, and enjoyed the warmth of the wine numbing his legs.

He had deposited his cap on the corner of the table, outside the circle of light. Paul, possibly attracted by the glint of silver, reached over and picked it up, turned it in his hand with a half-smile, which suddenly disappeared. He laid the cap down and looked up at Lemac.

"Oh, that's right," he said, slowly. "You're a customs man."

A cold wind seemed to have come in from the outside. Lemac stared at the old man, then to his son, and back again to his uniform. Yes, he was a customs man. Strangely enough, he felt embarrassed. He laughed lightly, to give himself countenance.

"That shouldn't come between friends," he said.

"No," agreed Paul.

And there was a long silence.

"The feeling is pretty high against us fellows?" Lemac asked, having decided to clear the atmosphere.

"Pretty high, yes."

"And yet why should it be so? We're only doing our duty."

"Yes, but that don't say you're doing right!" exclaimed Paul.

"It don't!" agreed father.

"There are thirty-two thousand of you fellows in France," Paul resumed. "And you draw pay to keep poor people from evading a tax."

Paul Martin, who had almost come to blows defending non-coms, an hour before, was now picking up cudgels against them, in customs men form, using the very arguments the Socialist, so called, had employed.

"We're necessary," Lemac said, defending himself.

"Why?"

"The duties hit mostly the foreigners——"

"And the poor. Why should we be made to support you all, I ask!"

"The law is not intended for the small offender," Lemac protested. "Suppose you buy sugar and coffee in Biaufon, across the border, and save a few sous, it would not matter a ——. It's the big fellows who take advantage of the general feeling against the duty law, to defraud the state on a large scale. Some poor fools among you help Swiss and German merchants to import, without duty, bundles of merchandize. In the long run those very duties you help to avoid paying, you pay yourself in land taxes, income taxes, and taxes on doors and windows!"

"They're high enough," sighed old Martin.

"Yes, and they'll keep on increasing. It's a vicious circle. The law is broken. Moves are made to enforce it, and you pay."

"We got to even things up. Why should we pay twice the price for tobacco than others pay ten miles away!"

"Your reasoning seems sound—to yourself. But followed to it's logical conclusion you'd see it would be to your advantage to pay the price. Paradoxical, but true."

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"It's unjust—anyone can see that!" the old man insisted.

"Anyhow, I'm in the service. Paul knows what that means. He's fought natives in Africa, under orders. They thought we were wrong."

"Because I've been a —— fool once, don't mean I'm going to stay so all my life," retorted Paul.

"For the first time Lemac became aware of a clock ticking. In the silence it rang out loudly, as a bell.

The customs man glanced at his watch.

"Getting late," he said.

He rose, as if to go, picking up his cap. Paul faced him, perturbed. The old man, not knowing what cue to follow, kept prudently silent.

"Look here, Lemac, we're old friends," Paul began.

"Yes——"

"And after all——"

"After all?"

"Friendship counts."

"It does."

Martin took the cap from Lemac's fingers, laid it on the table, and gently urged him into a chair. Then to his father:

"Father, warm up some wine. Lemac'll need it, this wet night."

"All right, all right!" the old man muttered. "Get rid of me so you can talk. I understand."

But he went over to the stove.

"Now, Lemac, I want to tell you something."

"Shoot."

"I know something of the game. I hear things. You understand?"

"More than you say."

"The smugglers, they say if outside customs men are brought in, they'll start again—shooting. The last customs man was killed eight months ago. And they can shoot."

"I know. I've seen you," grinned Lemac.

"Most of the customs men in this region have married. The others have many friends. They live, and let live. I don't mean they're bribed, or anything like that, but they know better than to interfere."

"Fine men, eh?"

"Wise, at any rate. You grin, and talk of them as though they were cowards. You won't blame them after you've patroled the bank of the Doubs on a dark night, with the roar of the river in your ears. One would do almost anything to be sure nobody's there with a rifle."

"You and I have faced knifes and rifles in the dark before," smiled Lemac.

"That was war. That's different."

"Uh—not so much, if the result is the same. But thanks for the tip, I'll be careful."

Martin shrugged, annoyed. But he could not let the matter rest.

"Maybe, if you went about your business quietly, without butting in on anything, you'd get along all right."

"You mean that—er—if I agreed to shut my eyes, I'd be safe?"

"Yes, there's just as good men as you in the customs, and they have come to that conclusion. They always act in the way the people around here want, though nothing has ever been said right out loud."

"You're all fierce fellows," Lemac said musingly.

Martin tried hard to control his rising anger.

"That night, when I got clipped in the hip, I said I'd return the favor."

"Consider it returned by the warning. It's not your fault if I don't take it."

"You better think it over. People here are queer. They're good men, quiet, but sometimes, they kill without thought. Look at the names about here. They're somber enough. There's the Mill of Death, the Ladders of Death. And those places have won their title."

"Names mean nothing. You may recall a certain chief in the Oases Region. He bore the pompous title of, 'Exterminator of the Roumis.' A sergeant of the Spahis caught up with him during a brush, and even that high-sounding appellation did not shift the cavalryman's saber the fraction of an inch."

"People here are not Arabs."

"But they eat to live, sleep, breathe, are human, in a word, therefore neither to be feared nor despised."

"Do you remember our friend, Mr. Mohammed?"

"Herr von Hutter, glorious martyr?"

"He thought he was doing right, helping the *bicos* against us."

"He was—in his own mind. You can't say he was wrong. Unfortunately we weren't wrong, either. Our interests conflicted, and we were luckier than he."

"Ah. I was just going to compare you with him——"

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"A compliment, my dear Paul."

"You are obtuse, and I will not take my warning seriously."

"On the contrary, I take the whole situation seriously."

Lemac got up, and laid his hand on his friend's shoulder.

"It grieves me to see you the mouthpiece of the smugglers."

"I have only voiced the general sentiment."

"There's no need of lies between us. I know you're up to your neck in this affair. You can't seem to help yourself. You think you have to follow others. But because you do, doesn't mean it's right."

Young Martin's brow lowered. Lemac knew this stubborn attitude and he felt the anger seeping through the friendship.

"Paul, we're friends, whatever happens. Even if you shoot at me, we're still friends."

"I wouldn't harm you, Lemac, you know that. But how can I help if others——"

"No one's asking you to. Just forget it."

Old Martin came back with a steaming kettle, smelling of hot wine. He added a little sugar and Lemac drank a goblet of the steaming concoction.

"I must be going," he said, presently.

"I guess so," replied Martin.

Again the awkward silence. The clock ticked away steadily.

"Paul, from now on we had better not speak to each other."

Paul nodded.

"I mean to clean up this smuggling. I am sent here for that. For your sake, I must not be seen with you, for then your friends would accuse you of giving information. After this business is over, we will see."

"After this business is over," Paul said soberly. "One of us will be gone. If you carry it through I'll go with my friends wherever they are sent. And maybe you won't carry it through, and such as I know you, it'll be because you're out of the way."

"Time will tell, Martin."

"In any case, farewell for a long time."

At the door Lemac offered his hand. Paul Martin hesitated, then shook his head.

"No use pretending, Lemac. My life is here, and friendship or not, I'm against you. My first joy at seeing you made me forget the brass buttons. We can't shake hands one day and go for each others' throats the next. I—I am sorry it should be so."

"Good night."

Lemac stepped out into the rain, and took the trail back to the village.

A depression gripped him at the thought of being forced to combat a friend. The gloom of the unseen mountains, looming in the darkness, menaced and seemed to weigh upon his shoulders. The immensity of this eternal quarrel between brothers, the somber possibilities for evil, choked him as if with physical grip. He felt very much like weeping. But his job was ahead. He had given his oath.

And his keen senses told him that he was already being watched, that some one in the darkness followed him. He smiled grimly and squared his shoulders.

And as he stepped into the tap-room of the Inn, he was whistling a bugle call.

CHAPTER IV

LEMAC was out of bed early and, scorning the railroad, covered the few miles to Maiche, the capital of the district, on foot. He interviewed the mayor, and the head of the police, and called in conference two customs sergeants.

He learned little.

The elusiveness of the smugglers was emphasized. The men seemed apologetic, but unwilling to take strong measures. The customs men themselves, seemed to be suffering from nerves. The thought of tightening the screws on the raiders appalled them. They spoke of probable murder.

Lemac asked to see the man who had been caught and tied.

He said that he had heard a noise in the bushes, that he had gone to find out the cause, had been seized from behind, thrown to the ground and bound. Lemac could not restrain a smile. The fellow was at least five feet ten, huge, rawboned, with fingers as thick as sausages. And he had come out of the fight without a scratch!

"Why didn't you call out?" he asked.

"I did. But the noise of the river was so loud I couldn't be heard thirty feet away."

"What did the disturbance that attracted you, sound like?"

"Some one called out my name."

"And you didn't think it might be a trap?"

"I thought it was the sergeant making the rounds."

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"Are you married?" Lemac asked suddenly.

"Yes."

"Girl from this part of the country?"

"Yes—from Le Russey, a few miles down the railroad."

"You know most of the men around, then. Did you recognize any voices."

"No, only that first voice, which I thought was the sergeant's."

The man seemed embarrassed. Lemac shifted his attack.

"And after you were tied—the men passed before you with bundles?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you recognize any of them?"

"It was dark——"

"I know. But even in the dark, one may recognize some peculiarity of shape. Did you?"

"No——"

"Did you try?"

"I never thought of it."

"Hope you will next time," Lemac said impatiently. "Were the men who tied you, rough with you?"

"Yes."

Lemac glanced at the fellow's wrists.

"And the sergeant found you in the morning I believe. Why did you not try to get away?"

"I did."

"How is it, since you were bound so tightly and you struggled so hard, that you did not cut or mark your wrists?"

The man flushed, and his eyes sparkled.

"Look here, what are you driving at, sir! My comrades will all vouch for my integrity. They bound my arms behind my back above the elbows, and fastened the same rope to a tree. My feet were slipped in a noose and tied to another tree, so that I couldn't move."

"I see," said Lemac. "Easing on one knot meant tightening on another."

"Where is the sergeant who was in charge?"

"He's with the post down near the Biaufon bridge. There's a little wood shack used as a barrack there. I was called here to report."

"How long does it take to go from here to the bridge on foot?"

"By the straight trails, three hours."

"Can you guide me there? I'd like to examine the place."

"Yes, sir."

Lemac turned to the other customs men.

"There won't be anything doing for the next three days. After that hold yourselves ready. The mayor will tell you that I carry credentials entitling me to your help."

"We're willing to help," was the agreement, but in a half-hearted way.

"Led by the man, whose name was Faucon, Lemac started out. Through woods to the edge of the cliffs overlooking the Doubs, they followed along this ridge. On the other side were similar cliffs—the Swiss border.

The Doubs River at that point cuts a deep valley, or gorge, some six hundred feet deep. Its course, strangled by the narrow rock-bed, is tumultuous. At one point it makes a fall of several feet. Through the funnel, made by nature, the uproar of swirling waters rose like faint thunder. An impression of unreality, of mysticism prevailed. Lemac had seen mountains before, had lived in them, but never had he felt as he did now, as if he had been transported to another planet, where the equations of the Earth no longer ruled.

The fir-pines rose all about, like the pillars of a gigantic cathedral, the green branches forming distorted arches overhead. The day was clear, the rain having ceased with morning. The fresh exhilarating scent of fallen needles came in great perfumed gusts with every inhaled breath. The sharp, intermittent tapping of a woodpecker resounded, and from time to time a cuckoo called.

The patches of sunshine made multicolored carpets, scattered throughout the dark undergrowth. And the patches of sky that showed through the foliage, were azure blue. Tiny streams murmured through the ground. The silence was alive with a thousand minute noises, the live stillness of the forest.

"Beautiful country," Lemac remarked.

His companion stopped, looked about.

"Yes," he agreed, as if aware for the first time that he lived in an earthly paradise.

"Are you from this part of the country?" Lemac inquired.

"No. From Savoy, in the Alps. That's beautiful, too."

"Yes, I've been there. No other place like it in the world," flattered Lemac.

"Do you remember the lakes? They're so blue they don't seem real."

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"Where, in the army, did you serve your time?"

"The Alpine Chasseurs."

"Some soldiers!" exclaimed Lemac. "Best troops in the world."

"And where did you serve?" the other asked.

"Colonial Infantry, assigned to the sharpshooters as sergeant my last three years."

"Great fellows, too," magnanimously asserted Faucon.

This having established a more friendly basis, Lemac, little by little, obtained confidences. Yes, Faucon agreed, it was hard to fight against people one drank with. And the poor fellows didn't see anything wrong in smuggling, anyway. And they were fighters, too. A bad thing to start a row.

"The ladders," suddenly announced Faucon.

They stood on the very crest of the cliff. Four hundred feet below, rolled the Doubs, fringed on each side by a narrow bank of sand. Across the way was the Swiss side, a few miserable stone houses clinging to its side.

Above, far in the azure, circled a lone hawk.

Lemac stared down the first ladder, which slid to a ledge a hundred feet below. The contraption was made of iron, the uprights solidly clamped into the rock.

"The famous ladders of death," Lemac said.

"Yes."

"Not so formidable. A bit steep, but with a sure foot and a good eye——"

"Yet people have fallen off."

Lemac shrugged.

The walk from Maiche had been strenuous, and he sat down to rest. The other imitated him. They smoked.

"How old are these ladders?"

"Fairly new," Faucon replied. "They're repaired occasionally. People around here say they've always been up."

"And the name?"

"A hundred and some odd years ago, there was an inn down there, established in an old mill. It was the time of the French Revolution. The nobles were fleeing France, and some passed through here. The inn was on the Swiss side. Then those poor ——s, thinking themselves safe, relaxed and went to bed, the keeper killed them, took their money and threw them in the Doubs."

"Nice fellow!"

"Great! But the son of one of the victims traced his father as far as the mill, and through a set of fortunate events, found out the truth. Before he could make a move, the river overflowed one night and took away the mill, inn keeper and his family. Playful river, the Doubs, when the snow's melting in the mountains."

"And since?"

"The mill was called the Mill of Death, and after that the ladders took the same name. And lived up to it, too. Every now and then, some one falls——"

"Accidentally?"

"Sometimes."

"Do the smugglers ever use them?"

"Probably. We keep a sentry at the top when nights are dark. But I think they take trails known only to themselves skirting the road. I've heard there is a trail close to the ladders, reaching one of the ledges. I havn't been able to find it and you bet I've looked."

"Let's go down," Lemac suggested.

AT THE bottom of the first ladder, he found himself on a ledge. The top of the next flight was some feet off. There were four ladders before he reached the bank of the river. At the bottom, Faucon continued to lead the way. A steel bridge spans the Doubs, links the French side with Switzerland and the hamlet of Biaufon. A frame house, with the coat-of-arms of France, stood alongside the road.

Within, Lemac found five customs men, resting. They saluted as they took note of his stripes, and the sergeant came forward to greet him.

"We've been expecting you, but not quite so soon."

"Nothing like getting on the job," Lemac replied, and took a seat facing the others.

He sensed a vague mistrust in their attitude. Unless he could break the ice, show them he held no blame for their failure, they might resent his presence, and hinder rather than help.

"The Government understands your position, sergeant," he began. "You havn't enough men to handle the situation."

The sergeant, who evidently expected caustic comment, relaxed slightly.

"This region has a reputation," Lemac went on. "All wonder how it was kept quiet so long. But now that all this trouble is started, you need help."

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"That's right."

"If the authorities sent in more men, the smugglers would get fighty, and there'd be no end of trouble."

"That's right."

"I come here, not as a superior, but as a colleague. I was sent here without assigned post, so that I could relieve you of all rounds, save those of the river-guards. At the same time I'll keep an open eye in Harquemont. If we work together we'll settle this in no time."

Not only did Lemac have credentials sufficient to put him in complete charge, but he also had *carte blanche*, a free hand as to ways and means. But he chose not to show the letters. The first thing to be avoided was jealousy among the force.

"Tell me what happens on raid nights?" he began.

"Even on moonlit nights, this gorge is pretty black, so you can imagine what it's like when it's cloudy or rainy. The river bellows, the wind blows, shaking the tree branches, and you can't see your hand before you. Some one either calls out, or whistles, as I sometimes do to attract attention when I'm making my rounds—see?"

"Yes."

"I gave orders not to go forward unless a password is given, and to fire a shot in the air if the answer wasn't right. That didn't work. When we ran in the direction of the shot, the smugglers landed somewhere else, and got the merchandise ashore and away."

"And when each man holds his post?"

"He's caught, and tied, just as Faucon was the other night."

"Um—that's a puzzler," Lemac agreed.

"When we do one thing, they shift and do the unexpected."

"The smugglers who get the merchandise on this side may not be the ones who bring it across. The fellows in the boat may wait for a signal, which is given them after their friends know exactly where you're going. They come over, throw the things ashore, and beat it back. As you say, there's a lot of noise. You can't tell the sound of a man crashing through the bush from a broken branch flying before the wind."

"I never thought they'd divide in two bunches."

"That's because, up to now, you've only dealt with smugglers in a small way, who did the job for themselves. Now, we're fighting a well-organized band, financed by big firms in Germany and Switzerland."

"You think so?"

"I know so. This affair attracts more attention than you'd imagine, in Paris. The ministry of finance, naturally, because the dues are not paid, the ministery of war and that of the interior, for other reasons. They've had detectives on the job in foreign countries. Here, a plain clothes man would be suspected immediately. It was thought better to send a man in uniform, a regular customs officer, who, as every one knows, hasn't much intelligence."

He laughed and the others joined in.

The Doubs was screeching and swirling, under the bridge, and from the falls some distance below, came the crashing rumble of cascading waters.

"The current is pretty swift for a crossing, even with a well-manned boat," remarked Lemac.

"That's another thing that gets us," the sergeant replied. "In the Summer, when the water is low, it's different. But during the rainy season, it's beyond me."

It was some minutes before Lemac had a possible solution.

"In rushing water, what is the usual means of crossing—a cable ferry! A man could swim across carrying two ropes. One rope is tied to a strong tree on the Swiss side. The other to the prow of the boat. The end of the first rope is tied to another tree on the French side, and the end given to the bunch of men on shore. With the two ropes, every man is at work and the boat shoots over. Bundles are thrown ashore. The ferry rope on this side is untied, and the boat is pulled back to the far shore. A little slow music and the trick is played."

"Why didn't we ever think of that!" the officers exclaimed.

"I got the idea from the way Faucon was tied. The leader of those smugglers knows a thing or two about the handling of hemp."

"Wait until they try it again," threatened the sergeant.

"When they try it again, let them go through," Lemac declared.

"Why?"

"Tell you later."

"A little while ago, I'd have thought you crazy not to nab them the first thing. But now, my hat's off to you. You may sound mad, but I'll bet you ain't——"

"Hope you win," Lemac said shortly.

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CHAPTER V

"SO YOU'RE going to chance it tonight?" Muller asked.

"Yes, why not?"

The innkeeper looked at Paul Martin soberly for a few seconds, then laughed.

"I thought the presence of your former friend might affect you."

"In what way?"

"That you'd give up the business."

"No chance. If one of us keeps out of the way it ain't going to be me."

"That's the spirit," replied the fat man. "When you all come back from this trip there'll be a lot of hot wine waiting for you, and a bonus."

Muller glanced cautiously around the room, saw there was no one within ear shot, then said—

"Your friend, Lemac, has been busy today, went to Maiche, then with Faucon to the Bridge post."

"Where is he now?"

The innkeeper pointed one of his sausage-like fingers toward the ceiling.

"In his room. He had supper at seven o'clock, said he was going out tonight, would be late coming back, and asked for the key."

"I guess he intends to patrol the river-bank," Martin said quietly.

"He ought to be given a good lesson to start with. If something happens to him the first night, he won't feel so chipper from then on."

Martin reached out and grasped Muller's arm, his face turning pale. The innkeeper winced, and freed himself.

"I don't want him killed," Martin said.

"Who said anything about killing?" Muller demanded evenly. "I guess you can't object to a good beating, can you?"

"Who'll give it to him?"

"I'll get one of the huskies from Le Russey to trail him at night, and put him on the sick list for two weeks."

Martin laughed.

"Muller, I'm the strongest in the bunch. And I couldn't handle him. He's as quick as a cat."

Muller smiled.

"We'll make it two men, then—the Gaudat brothers. Xavier alone would give you a lot of trouble, and with Francois, no single man would have a chance."

Martin knew the two brothers—the gigantic mountaineer, well over six feet, with a chest like a barrel, and fists as massive as sledge hammers; the former wrestler, who had toured France in "strong man" shows. Somehow Martin could not find the words to voice his approval.

"Where are we to meet tonight?" he asked instead.

"The pine grove past the 'Burned Farmhouse,' ten minutes from the entrance to the trail."

"The sentry at the ladders?"

"Is on top tonight, just as we planned on."

"And the signal?"

Muller drew from a drawer a tiny electric torch, worked it three times, then twice after an interval.

"Pretty cold night for a swim," Martin offered.

"He gets well-paid," Muller said. "His body is rubbed in oil when he goes in. When he comes ashore he's given blankets. And while the boat's on the way back he's rubbed down and given brandy and more blankets. It's healthy, when everything is attended to like that."

"What did you do about the other fellow, the one that got drowned?"

"We had to give his wife hush money. She had several kids and was glad to get anything. It's not every employer that pays a pension."

"No, that's right."

"This new fellow is an ex-fisherman from Brittany, and swims like a fish. No more accidents. We've got this down to a system. And after Lemac is out of the way, they won't risk more trouble."

Muller drew out a box of Havanas, handed a fistful to Martin.

"For the bunch," he said.

A step sounded on the stairs.

"That's him," whispered Muller.

Lemac entered the room, strode up to the zinc, nodded with friendliness to Muller, briefly greeted Martin, and imbibed a brandy.

"Going far tonight?" Muller inquired.

"I'll go as far as the bridge and have a look around," said Lemac. "What do you think, Muller, is the night dark enough for those fellows to try anything?"

"They're a little too confident," explained Muller. "They may try. You see, I reason it out this way: Those fellows don't fear the customs men, and they want to get as much across as they can before more men are sent here."

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Martin admired Muller. The obvious thing would have been to try and lull Lemac's suspicions. But Muller was never obvious. The gendarmes in Maiche were his intimate friends, drank with him, thought they were getting information out of him, little suspecting that the fat innkeeper was the spider in the smugglers' web.

Martin had gradually become entangled. His natural love for adventure had caused him to seek relief from the monotonous routine of the farm, from the care of cattle and the boring dicker with buyers. And, working for Muller, the pay was high. Martin earned as much leading the active members of the band, as the average doctor or notary. When he married he wanted to place his farm on a solid basis, with new implements. He would join one of the cooperative societies for the distribution of his products. He had his eye on some stock in Switzerland which he thought could be easily acclimated to his soil. To achieve all this he needed money. That which was started for love of adventure, was now kept up from love of gain.

Of course, if the smuggler is caught he runs the chance of being condemned to prison, from six months to five years. But he who computes the loss will never get the gain, and Martin shut his eyes to possible failure.

Born and raised in the region, with a natural knack for track finding, he knew his way up the cliffs, knew a dozen trails skirting the road, knew where the Doubs was the narrowest. His brief brushes with customs men had not contributed to his fear of an eventual reckoning. His great strength, his army training gave him a decided advantage over the men of the law. When his strong hands were on a man's shoulders, that man went down, and quickly. No Arab, no red Indian ever showed more sagacity in stalking a sentry than did Martin.

Faucon, for instance, strong as he was, had found no time to resist. To quiet cries, to prevent the possibility of the gag being displaced Martin used a simple and beneficial system. He filled a scarf or handkerchief with river-sand. If the man opened his mouth the gravel slid within. As for the raids, Martin first reconnoitered the position of the guards, knew where each was stationed. When the alarm was given, and the officers rushed about, Martin would flash his tiny signal from the right place. His light was hooded so that it could be seen only from the front.

Martin thought of these details to purchase reassurance. He had to think again and again that he had every angle covered. Lemac was as strong as he, undoubtably as brave. Martin recalled the night prowl in Africa. Martin's sole advantage lay in the knowledge of the country, and the customs man could soon obtain that. Yes, it was bad business to plot against a pal, but what else could he do?

Lemac had dropped his glass to the zinc and lighted a cigar casually. He asked a few questions about the probable weather, then turned to go.

Muller called him back.

"Have one on me," he offered, pouring another glass. "And here's luck."

"Thanks," Lemac accepted.

He left with a constrained word of farewell to Martin.

"Wait until he's out of sight," Muller advised. "Then to the farmhouse and see the Gaudats."

Ten minutes later, Martin had reached the last house, and struck to the right, where he found a trail through the bushes, crossed plowed fields and hedges, with the agility of a goat. Once on the highroad, some hundred yards off, he thought he heard the heels of Lemac's military boots, clicking steadily.

Poor Lemac, it was hard to have to trick him. But as long as he wouldn't "live and let live"—Martin shut his eyes as he thought of the man-handling he would receive.

" 'S that you, African?"

"Yes."

Before him loomed the ruined walls of the Burned Farmhouse, which the smugglers used as a meeting-place. There were fifteen or sixteen men there, all young, active fellows from Harquemont and the neighboring villages. Martin asked for the Gaudat brothers, who detached themselves from the knot of shadows, and came forward. Briefly, Martin explained.

"And we must bash his head in?" asked Xavier.

"No, pound him, but don't kill him."

"I'll break his arm," said the wrestler.

Martin felt himself growing pale. But he did not protest. True, a broken arm would be the best thing. Lemac might have to go to the hospital, probably to

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Morteau. Yes, this would save Lemac's life, for should he become too annoying, Muller would dispose of him.

"Yes, his arm," Martin agreed. "Be careful not to strike too hard. And when the trick's done, go home and stay there until I let you know the coast is clear."

They agreed.

"Listen!"

Lemac's footsteps could be heard plainly.

"He's going to the ladders. Catch up with him before he gets there. We're taking the side trail down to the road, and—just a minute——"

They paused, hesitating.

"Listen, boys," Martin went on. "Just the arm, get that? If you go too far you'll have me to deal with."

"Don't worry, African."

They melted into the darkness.

Martin trembled. His friend——

But it was too late now, the die was cast.

CHAPTER VI

LEMAC had caught a sign of understanding between Muller and Paul, and knew that he was in for trouble. Men dealing in the affairs with which Lemac occupied himself, get an insight into character. And Lemac's discernment amounted almost to magic.

How many times has one had the experience, while talking with a bland affable person, to feel, that were all barriers, legal and otherwise, removed that person would gladly plunge the business-end of a clasp-knife into one's back? Some call this insight. Whatever the name, Lemac had the sense developed beyond the usual.

So, tonight, as he strode along the silent highway he had the "feel" that something was afoot.

And he could not blame Martin, if, as he suspected, the latter was the head of the smugglers. Had he been in Martin's place, he would have acted the same way. Lemac admired loyalty and determination wherever he found them. Those qualities were not necessarily excluded from the make-up of the law-breaker. Martin's loyalty was due his companions. Simply because he, Lemac, was the man sent, was not sufficient reason for Martin to abandon his pals.

He was sure that murder was beyond Martin, even murder of a stranger. And had he not once been Martin's friend?

But Muller was an unknown quantity. How far he was mixed up in the business Lemac did not know. One fact was certain, there was money in the game, and Muller liked money. This was where Lemac had it on the other officers—he thought ahead of time, considered matters from all sides, had a knack of putting himself in the place of his opponents.

The smugglers evidently wanted to give newcomers a lesson. But Muller, himself, capable of evil though he was, would avoid staining his hands, as the murder of a customs official, if discovered would certainly lead to the guillotine. What scheme would they hit upon to put him out of the way? Kidnaping? That was risky, allowing the identity of the perpetrators to leak out, with always the chance of an escape that would reveal everything. Frighten him? Martin knew better. What course was left? Perhaps to injure him so that he would be forced to withdraw.

The road was muddy from the rain of the night before, and Lemac circled a pool, climbing the sloping sides of the road. He had served in Guinea against the rebellious Sousous, who were bushmen of the finest type. Under his orders had been other negroes as expert as the foe, and from them Lemac had learned the manner of proceeding in the dark, through undergrowth.

He decided to go through the bushes where there was less likelihood of a surprize. So, instead of regaining the beaten path he kept alongside, with an eye on the lighter space that marked the course of the Midway.

Presently he was aware of low, hushed voices.

"Where is he gone?"

He silently crawled to the embankment. Two great shapes were visible in the open.

"He was on the road a few minutes ago—we heard him."

"Yes, probably walking in soft ground ahead—the road is muddy there on account of that stream."

"I don't care what African says," the smaller man remarked. "I think we ought to knock him on the head first. Those fellows bother us too much."

"Talk less, and come ahead," the other grumbled. "We've got to catch him before he reaches the ladders."

They hurried forward. Lemac kept a dozen feet behind them, forming a plan of

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attack. With his own strong frame, his trained muscles, and the element of surprize in his favor, he held no fear of the loutish peasants.

They had reached the emplacement on the road where the brook mentioned had formed a pool. A match was struck. The men were searching about.

"He hasn't been here—all the tracks are at least two hours old."

"Where could he have gone?"

"You stay here—I'll scout around, and see if I can locate him."

Bad scheme, thought Lemac, from a strategic point of view, to divide one's forces.

He waited until the smaller man was out of sight, then lightly dropped to the road. The peasant had his back turned, for he was peering in the opposite direction. With a leap, Lemac was upon him, his left arm, rigid as an iron bar, under the chin, his knee in the small of the back. This is a favorite trick of the Paris Apache, called, without particular reason, *le coup du père François.* There was no resistance to offer, the best guard being a backward fall on the adversary. But the man did not know, and struggled. So great was his strength it seemed for a few moments, that he would succeed in breaking the hold. Then Lemac's right fist collided with the jaw, with a smart snap. And the colossus went down.

Lemac put on the handcuffs, then tied the great feet with the man's suspenders. This done he picked up the huge bulk and deposited it in the ditch.

"One," he murmured, and waited.

"Eh, Xavier!" came a voice. "I don't see him."

"Come back here, then, and don't yell so loud," Lemac said, in muffled tones, imitating the brother.

Lemac thought his task would be easy, but as he grappled with his new opponent he found himself gripped by the wrist, his arm twisted back, another powerful arm across his shoulders. He was up against a wrestler of considerable skill. With a quick movement the customs man's right knee traveled upward, caught the man in the abdomen, and stretched him writhing to the ground.

"And two," said Lemac as he slipped on another pair of handcuffs.

This done, he wiped his forehead with his handkerchief and sat down. When the men were fully conscious, he questioned them.

"Your name?"

"Won't say."

"You'll be identified tomorrow."

"Well, wait until then."

But Lemac had no wish to wait. He had a simple method for extracting information. He placed his thumb below the right ear of the big man, and pressed strongly between the bones. A grunt, then a howl——

"Your name?" Lemac gently suggested.

"We'll get you, wait——"

The customs man pressed again, this time with more strength. The yell that followed was piercing, but Lemac was satisfied that the smugglers were probably in the valley now, with the wind and the roar of the river in their ears.

"Gaudat!"

"That's a nice name—and your friend?"

"My brother."

Lemac struck a match and regarded them closely.

"If I take you to Harquemont, you'll be put in prison and tried. Smuggling means a year, attempted murder ten to fifteen years in Cayenne. Great place, Cayenne—for undertakers."

He paused briefly.

"I have a proposition to make," he resumed. "Suppose we forget what has gone on tonight, let by-gones be by-gones. I let you go, you promise to quit smuggling——"

"We won't tell on the others," Xavier put in.

"Who's asking you to! You just forget that you ran up against me tonight, and go home and keep under cover. Remember I know who you are—and if you've given me the wrong name, remember I don't forget faces."

He unlocked the handcuffs, stepping backward into an open space, his quick eye alert for the slightest move. But the men seemed too astonished to do anything but stare.

"Now don't tell your wives," Lemac warned. "By the way, what were you supposed to do to me?"

"Break your arm."

"Sweet," remarked Lemac.

And leaving the two to wonder at the new breed of customs man, he disappeared into the woods.

Fifteen minutes later, Lemac hailed the sentry at the top of the ladders.

"Anything happened yet?"

"No."

"Good. Stick up here."

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Then he began the descent. Even to his strong nerves, the fumbling about in pitch darkness was unpleasant. Far across, like stars, glimmered lights in the farmhouses on the Swiss slopes. And even as he looked they winked out.

"That's right," he thought. "It's getting late."

When he reached the bottom, he hesitated, for he knew that somewhere between himself and the river, the smugglers were scattered.

Cautiously he proceeded forward.

"It's you, Macard?" some one asked close at hand.

"Yes, it's me," he agreed softly, and passed on.

At first he wondered at the fellow's folly, then realized they were not used to officers who skulked in the dark. The name Macard was as good as any other, and when challenged again, as he was several times, he gave that name, his one fear being that he would introduce himself thus to the real Macard.

On the river-bank, he crouched, and waited. The gorge was so dark he could not see more than a foot away. In the natural pocket formed by the giant cliffs, the darkness was abysmal, unbelievable. He understood now, why the customs men felt nervous on patrol.

Close to the bank, the water showed as a faintly luminous, sinuous streak of foam. The wind was howling and broken branches hurtled through with echoing crashes. Smaller gusts brushed by like ghostly cries from lost souls. The old superstition that the spirits of drowned persons come back and shriek for help occurred to him. He laughed at himself, but nevertheless a fear that was not wholly physical clutched at his iron nerve.

He longed to sing, to whistle, to make some noise himself to combat that immense orchestra of sound, made by unseen things of the night. Mysterious noises now began, a sound of movement in the dark. The night seemed suddenly alive with prowling beings. Then, sharp and startling, came the report of a rifle, hundreds of yards away. Then silence. A long silence.

Lemac allowed perhaps five minutes to elapse, then returned inland. The goods had doubtless been landed along the banks, and the smugglers were on their way. To where? Harquemont or Maiche? He did not know. That's what he was here to find out.

Now came the faint call of the guards, one to the other, and more movement in the darkness. Lemac, throwing caution to the winds, ran toward the road at a tangent, following in the direction of the noise.

He soon reached the tail of the outfit.

"It's Macard," he boldly whispered.

"I thought you were decoy tonight."

"No. African told me to follow with the rest."

"What did you draw, silk or watches?"

"Silk."

"So did I. Ain't it —— to work your way on this slippery ground with these bundles?"

Lemac agreed, and bent over as if feeling a weight.

"That fellow who swims certainly earns his money."

"You bet," agreed Lemac. "Did you hear his teeth chatter?"

"They fair rattled."

The ascent up the rocky trail had begun, a difficult climb for men with bundles on their shoulders, a feat of which only these mountain boys were capable.

A slightly perceptible light between the trees announced the straight road at the top of the cliff. Lemac hung back, and watched his chance to break away from the group, then cut into the bushes. The very darkness and noise that had been a menace to other customs men, had tonight been his servants.

He reached the road, some distance away from the others, who had gathered there and were resting. Their fearless attitude revealed absolute contempt for the law. Cigarets and cigars were lighted; there was loud talking. Other men appeared, probably the decoys. It would be sheer bad luck if the man who had spoken to him now picked up conversation with the real Macard.

But there was no sign of confusion. His trick had not been found out.

He quietly followed, as far as the Burned Farmhouse, where part of the bundles were hidden, and the rest taken on, into the village, *through the streets*, and straight into the rear entrance of Muller's Café!

As for Lemac he retraced his steps, as far as the sentry by the ladders.

"Hey, do you know how to fasten up a broken arm?" he asked.

"Yes, we're supposed to learn that in the service. Who's hurt?"

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"I'm supposed to be. Now, get splints, cut through my sleeve with your bayonet, and tie me up."

Less than an hour later, Lemac, leaning on the arm of the customs officer, entered the front door of the inn.

The place was deserted, but as he started to ascend the stairs, he thought he saw a movement behind the swinging door back of the zinc counter.

Yes, Muller was there.

CHAPTER VII

THE light flooded in at the open window. The moist air of the mountain smelled good, of fresh vegetation and mountains. The school-bell was ringing, for it was eight o'clock.

Lemac slipped into his clothing awkwardly, fastened his tunic at the throat because of the bandaged arm. Then he perched his cap at a smart angle and went down to the tap room for breakfast.

Already several customers were imbibing their morning "drop." The customs man sat down at a table and shouted for his coffee and rolls. The grimy serving-maid, still disheveled, ran forward, one step, then a lurch to one side, another lurch to the right, bobbing as a bell-buoy at sea.

She placed the customary eye-opener before Lemac, a small glass of cherry alcohol, a huge blue-flowered bowl of coffee, and hot rolls, smelling high of melted butter.

"And is your arm hurt, M'sieu Lemac!" she exclaimed.

"No. I wrapped it that way because I wouldn't need it."

She regarded him slyly.

"You customs gentlemen are alike, trying to tease me—but here, let me butter your rolls."

She suited the action to the word, preparing his breakfast so that he would experience no difficulty with his single arm. As she did so a running fire of comment passed her thick lips.

"And I'll bet it's the smugglers that did it. A nice, polite gentleman like you, too! They should be ashamed, treating a newcomer that way. What reputation will it give the village!"

"Its reputation is made already," Lemac assured her.

"I used to be sorry I wasn't married," she went on, not heeding the interruption. "But I'm not now. It must be awful to have a man who spends his nights prowling the woods, catches colds, and comes home with a grouch, and may be killed from one day to the other, and leave the woman without support. A lot of good the extra money does, when a man's dead and underground!"

"A lot," assented Lemac.

She looked at him admiringly.

"I always says, 'It's those customs men that are brave.' "

"Ah?"

"I don't know why, but I just love men in uniform."

"Men in uniform are not to be loved."

"You're a kidder," she giggled.

"Melie, you know everybody here, don't you?"

"Yes, sir—from the mayor down."

"And Paul Martin?"

"African? Yes, of course."

"He's got a girl, hasn't he?"

"Sure. I never did care for him though, that marrying way, I mean. He's a nice fellow, that no one can say different, but I don't know—he's sort of wild."

"That passes with age."

"And a big man is bothersome about the house. I like small men—they're neater."

She paused, briefly, then added—

"Not that you're small, but compared to him——"

"Of course," he smiled. "Say, Melie, who is Paul Martin's girl?"

"Marie Despres."

"Good looking?"

"Um—some think so. She's slim, and white and pink. Her father had money once, so he sent her out to school, in a convent I think. She has a piano, she reads poetry, and you never see her wearing wooden shoes. But girls like that ain't healthy."

"For my part I like strong girls who ain't afraid of work," Lemac said diplomatically.

"That I ain't— No girl in the village can beat me working!"

Several impatient customers pounded on tables to be served. But Emelie, or Melie for short, did not heed. Brass buttons had a fascination, against which her weak soul could not fight. And Lemac's cameo features and distinction of bearing appealed to the large heart throbbing in her immense bosom.

"Where does she live?" Lemac continued.

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"Over there—across the railroad tracks. It's a nice house, but it ain't hers. Her father sold it, but she keeps rooms there now he's dead."

Lemac had learned what he wanted.

"Careful, Melie," he warned, "or you'll lose your job."

She pouted at this breaking off of the conversation, and lumbered to the counter where her great, skilful hands toyed with glasses and bottles, adjusting the level of the liquid to the sum deposited on the zinc surface.

Melie's evident jealousy showed that Paul's girl was beautiful and refined. Surely she did not approve of Paul's shady associations. Lemac could imagine the long arguments between the two, in which she begged him to abandon smuggling. On the other hand, Lemac again reasoned, she might be afraid of the disorderly farmhouse, might be the cause of Paul's desire to make more money. At any rate he could not let the chance slip. He finished his rolls and coffee leisurely and then went outside. He must also take the chance, that Martin, tired from the raid of the night before, was sleeping.

THE house across the tracks stood on a rounded green hill, better built than the dwellings close to the village, with the exception of those on the main street. As he drew near he heard the tinkling notes of a piano. Not very good. Not very bad. Average playing, he decided.

He reached the door and pulled the bell. A clear, silvery peal inside, then rapid steps down the stairs, and the door swung open. Lemac removed his cap.

Marie Despres was a beautiful young woman. A delicate blonde with a marvelous complexion, she boasted dark eyes, which reflected every mood. She was high strung and determined. Yet, there was a certain wholesome sweetness about her that impressed Lemac immediately. She was all woman. He had made no mistake in coming.

"Mademoiselle Despres?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I am Lemac."

"Yes," she replied. "Will you come in?"

"Ah," he thought, "so Paul has spoken, and I am in favor." He smiled. "Mademoiselle Despres, you must forgive this intrusion. I want to talk to you about Monsieur Martin."

"Yes."

She led the way into a quaintly furnished parlor, where Lemac sat down on a gilded Louis XV chair, and was conscious of his thick-soled boots on the carpet.

"You know that Paul and I are friends," he began.

"I know that you saved his life once, and he has spoken of you often."

"He seemed to like me?"

"As a brother."

"Since coming here I haven't had time to do anything to change his opinion of me. The trouble is, this."

He touched the buttons on his uniform.

"I guess so," she said, looking away quickly.

"He believes that makes a difference in our friendship. I don't. I am a few years older than he. At the barracks, though we held an even rank, I always considered him more or less under my tutelage. I can't stop liking him just because he is in the wrong position, or on the opposite side of the fence from which I find myself. Is that clear?"

"Yes."

"Now, Paul is a smuggler. Oh, don't protest, *mademoiselle*, give me credit for enough intelligence to guess that."

"Yes, he is," she said frankly. "That's why——"

She broke off embarrassed.

"You mean—you don't know whether I have his interest at heart, or my own."

Her uneasiness was an admission.

"Look at me, *mademoiselle*, and use that feminine instinct all women boast of possessing. Do I want to do anything save good, for Martin?"

She gazed at him steadily, then nodded.

"You're sincere," she agreed.

"Good." He had no time for the finer approaches. "We will suppose that you are not in love with Paul, that you do not endow him with the qualities of an angel, or the cleverness of an arch imp."

"I'll try not to, for a little while," she smiled.

"You know for a fact that the pitcher will go to the well once too often, that in spite of his genuine ability in his—er—chosen profession, Paul will be nabbed. So much for his cleverness. Among his qualities, Paul has some faults—he is hot tempered. If cornered by the customs men, would he take the certainty of three months or a year

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in jail, or the chance that he might escape if he fought?"

"He'd fight."

"He's a fine shot—a strong man. If he fought, he'd kill somebody—that means hard labor—or——"

He saw her turn pale.

"I'll put my cards on the table," he said. "I give you my word, that before another week is over the whole band will be surrounded and caught. I don't want Paul there. The others hold more philosophy, they could stand jail. The thought is not absolutely unbearable to them. But Paul is one of these animals you can't keep in a cage."

"You are right, Monsieur Lemac."

"Thanks for saying so," he remarked dryly. "I thought maybe you'd see it my way."

"But how can I help?"

"That big boy loves you."

"I—I believe so."

"And I'm sure of it. The night I give you the tip, play ill. Tell him you feel you're going to die. There is no doctor here, Maiche has one. Net result, Romeo hot-foots it to the capital city of the district, routs the respectable practitioner out of bed, brings him back here. You don't need to worry about what sickness to invent, just give symptoms; headache, fever. In the meanwhile I'll shake my little net over the others."

"That will be deceiving Paul," she protested.

Lemac lifted a wise finger.

"You'll find that many a man has to be deceived for his own good."

"Are you married?" she questioned curiously.

"No," he returned. "If I were, I'd say deception was never excusable."

They laughed.

"So," she resumed. "You're going to get the smugglers, and try to spare Paul."

"Yes, I want to spare Paul. Principle number one for good wives: Don't insist on understanding everything," Lemac joked. "But I have business and must be going."

He rose and started for the door. She stopped him.

"You don't fear that I'll warn Paul about the—raid?"

"It's not for your interest to do so. And in any case I don't believe the saying that a woman can't keep a secret, applies to you."

She flushed with pleasure. Yes, his confidence had not been misplaced. To save Paul Martin—their purpose was identical.

IT WAS some minutes before Lemac, strolling about the town, located Muller. Fortunately for Lemac's, plans, the innkeeper was on the station platform. He was surrounded by an animated group, but upon Lemac's appearance he detached himself and came forward.

"Hello," he boomed.

"Good morning," Lemac said quietly.

"What's the matter with your arm?"

"Hurt!"

"So I see—much?"

"I think it's broken."

"No! How did it happen?"

"Brush with a charming fellow citizen."

"Those fellows are getting too bold," Muller remarked.

"They are," Lemac assented.

"What are you going to do? Stay on duty?"

"I don't know. I'm going down to Morteau to see the doctor. I think I'm entitled to a rest."

"Then, you're not coming back?"

"I hope not."

He drew out a cigar and bit the end off. Muller obligingly held a match, then lighted his own huge pipe. In volume of smoke and intensity of smell it rivaled a glue factory chimney.

From a side-tracked freight-car, men were rolling barrels. Muller, from time to time, took his pipe from his teeth, and watched. The barrels were addressed to the Muller Café, Harquemont, and came from Bordeaux.

"Good business, eh?" Lemac asked.

"Fair."

"This is a thirsty place."

A hand-truck arrived, piled high with barrels, and these were loaded into another freight car, which was to be attached to the nine-thirty train for Morteau. The huge wooden cylinders thumped with a hollow sound, down the slides, and were hoisted into the gaping door.

"Empties," explained Muller. "I'm sending them to be re-filled.

"By the way," he began, and then lowered his voice.

He indicated to Lemac that he would like to speak to him out of ear-shot of the others. They walked side by side, up the platform, away from the cars.

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"Shouldn't be hard to get at those fellows," he began. "The stupidity of smugglers in some things is proverbial. They'll organize splendidly, then do some little thing that will give all away."

"Yes?"

"I remember a story I heard when I was a kid. Gunpowder was under government monopoly. Importation was prohibited; result, smuggling. Parties from Switzerland used to bring in hundred pound sacks, to a man. Regular business, run like clockwork. One day, eighteen fellows, with the usual burden, crossed the border safely. Then one of the number noticed a leakage in his bag, a small hole in the bottom, which had allowed a thin stream to escape, forming a white trail. He called a council. All agreed the evidence must be wiped out as some patrol might come along and follow. They piled the sacks in a heap, and waited, while the fellow went back.

"He found the seepage had started soon after they had crossed the border. An idea of genius came over him. He touched his pipe to the trail, then merrily whistling, started to rejoin his comrades. A reverberating detonation, and the eighteen powder sacks went up, the men with them!"

"Why didn't he fire the trail from the place of discovery?"

"You see," Muller went on to explain. "The poor fellow had at one time been in the customs service, and it had affected his intelligence."

With this he slapped Lemac on the back and burst into loud laughter. Lemac laughed, but with restraint.

"Let's think," he questioned, mentally. "This fellow, who is as sociable as a wild boar, has taken me aside to tell a yarn which has no point, and is as old as the hills. He has put a strain upon himself to give it a new twist, and he doesn't look as though he enjoyed mental work. It's obvious he wanted to get me away from the spot. Why?"

In the distance the puffing of the train could be heard, approaching quickly. The section hands were rolling the car toward the main track. Lemac's suspicions grew. He answered nonchantly to Muller's questions on various subjects, and kept the wheels in his head turning.

"If my arm is seriously hurt, I'll write you, and you can send my baggage down," he said to Muller.

With a scream of tortured brakes, the little train pulled in and stopped. Contrary to the ordinary French trains, the *regional* had passenger coaches with a center aisle. One-third of the last car was divided into compartments for first-class passengers. There a man could safely hope to be alone as first-class travelers were almost unknown on the line. To bear out the suffering from his injured arm Lemac declared he would get a private compartment.

At the last moment Muller offered his hand, which the officer shook vigorously.

AT MORTEAU Lemac made at once for police headquarters. As the bandaged arm would hamper him in what he intended to do, and he would before leaving, visit the doctor to have the member "dressed" he removed the splints and bandages. Then he went to the freight yards and showed credentials to the yard master who allowed him to enter the car which had been attached at Harquemont.

The barrels, supposed to be empties were addressed to a firm in Dijon, a fact which strengthened Lemac's suspicions. A hammer and chisel were procured, and the top of a barrel knocked off. Within, a cleverly arranged framework formed a crate, in which rested a bundle. The barrel, while having the hollow sound of an empty was a clever container for outgoing goods.

The cover was carefully replaced, and Lemac went back into town. At the nearest café he consulted the business directory of France, found the name of the firm, which was highly rated, and owned by foreigners.

"Oh, here we are!" murmured Lemac, and went back to the police station.

Five minutes later, the wires were humming, giving the Dijon force interesting data. The first part of his work was accomplished. He knew where the merchandize went, the system that entered it into France, and distributed it. Everything had gone almost too easily to be true. The brush with the Gaudat brothers, had been the only unpleasant episode—aside from his estrangement from Paul.

With the capricious behavior of early Spring, the weather had turned out warm. Lemac became thirsty, and entered the café fronting the station. He ordered a drink, and whistled as he drummed his fingers on the marble top. He smiled at the waiter,

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smiled at the world. Fortune was smiling; it was Spring, and great to be alive!

Yes, he would hurry things up, save delay.

Tonight, would see the conclusion of the affair.

CHAPTER VIII

PAUL MARTIN, pale and shaking entered the café, sought out Muller. The innkeeper, who saw there was something wrong, slid out of his niche behind the counter.

"Come up-stairs," he said briefly, indicating with a side-long move of his head the staring customers, who had noticed Martin's peculiar behavior.

In Muller's private rooms, Martin sank into a chair, wiped his forehead with a handkerchief, moistened his lips with his tongue.

"What's wrong?" asked Muller.

"I can't go to the river tonight, Muller. You'll have to get Macard or one of the others."

"Why?"

"I've got to go to Maiche after the doctor."

"Father sick?"

"No. Mademoiselle Despres."

"What's the matter?"

"I don't know. That's what I'm getting the doctor for. She's delicate, I think. She may have mountain fever. You know strangers here get it sometime."

"She was born up here, left when she was ten, so it shouldn't be the climate."

"But she's ill, very ill—she was so white——"

Muller laughed.

"Listen, Paul, I'll send for the doctor. You carry out your job tonight. She won't die before you come back, don't worry."

"But I know how long it will take me to go to Maiche—and the other— No, Muller, she said she wanted me to come back with the doctor, in fact, she insisted. There's something peculiar. She may feel she's going. People get hunches sometimes before they die."

"You're preparing for a happy married life, Paul," Muller chided sarcastically. "Stopping all your work when Marie has a headache! What'll it be after you're married?"

"After we're married," replied Paul with unconscious cynicism. "It'll be different."

"You must go tonight," Muller boomed. "The biggest load we've ever handled is coming through."

"I can't. I've hired a fly. It'll be here in a few minutes."

"I'll tell you right now, you won't get a percentage."

"I don't want it."

"What's more, I'll fine you two other trips."

"You've got no right to do that, Muller."

"I'll take the right. It angers me to see a fine, wide-awake man like you kidded along by a skirt. They all pull the sick stuff to make themselves interesting."

He puckered his lips and his brows came together. If Martin had been less concerned about Marie, he would have seen that Muller was not wholly frank, that he had something up his sleeve.

"Can you take your mind off Marie a minute to listen to something I have to tell—important, too!"

"Yes."

"This morning, around eight, Lemac shows up with an arm cradled in bandages. He says like this, that some men attacked him last night and smashed his wing."

"Well, didn't we know that?"

"Wait! I sees him this morning at the station, on the way to Morteau. I says to myself—follow him Muller. I don't know why—just one of them hunches. He went in a compartment, I traveled third-class—and let him get out first. But I lost sight of him. I can't be everywhere at once. Toward three in the afternoon I see him in the station café. And that arm that was supposed to be busted! He was drumming on the table and looked as chipper as a robin with a new caught worm. And no bandages, either! Now, what I want to know is—who told him we planned to have his arm busted!"

"One of the Gaudats may have sold out to him."

"Not a chance. I sent a man down to ask them. He just got back a few minutes ago, and says neither Xavier nor Francois saw him last night."

"That's queer!"

"Yes, ain't it!"

Muller paced the room, back and forth, as if thinking. Then he spoke up, in a different tone of voice, as if he had abandoned the problem of Lemac and the broken arm to return to the more immediate question of Martin's proposed trip to Maiche.

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"How did that girl of yours look at smuggling?"

"She thinks it's wrong. She was brought up religious, you know."

"Did she ever try to stop you?"

"Many times. I promised to give up the trade when we were married."

"And did she know about tonight's trip?"

"I believe I had—mentioned that I'd be out tonight."

Muller thumped his fist on the table.

"That proves it!"

"Proves what?"

"What I've thought for a long time. You won't get mad, African?"

"That depends."

"Well, mad or not, I've got to tell what I think. Did you ever wonder why Marie stayed in this forsaken place after her father died? You were in Africa then, so she didn't stay on account of you. She has an education, a little money. Why didn't she go to the city and live like a lady?"

"She loves the mountains, she says."

"She says!" snorted Muller.

Paul got to his feet quickly.

"What do you mean?"

"African, you ain't the first good man to be fooled by a woman. There have been lots with as much brains as you let a skirt do the same. You're lucky you got me to look after you."

"Don't be a fool, Muller."

"Did you ever know me to be a fool in anything concerning business? Smuggling is my business. I watch everybody."

"You're nervous, and suspect everybody!"

"Did you tell her that Lemac was to have his arm busted?"

Martin started violently.

"Yes," he said hoarsely. "I went to see her about five, just at sunrise, as I always do when I've been down in the valley. She don't sleep—waits all night to find out if I'm safe——"

"Or if there's another load here in town."

"Oh, you must be crazy, Muller," Martin said, trying to control his excitement. "It can't be!"

"No? Well, I'll tell you something more. Lemac's been to see her."

Martin lowered his lids but did not move.

"Can you prove that?"

"Yes, I saw him going in her house."

"That isn't enough."

"So you don't believe me!"

"You're trying to prove a point."

"And I'll go to any lengths, eh? Yes, I will."

He opened the door and called out—

"Melie—Oh, Melie, come up a minute."

"The serving-girl, eh? No, I don't want to listen to that——"

"Why, are you afraid of the truth!"

Muller laid both hands on Paul's shoulders and urged him into a chair. His strength was great, and Martin was weak, from his fear.

"Now if you hear us out sensibly, you'll show more guts than you did fighting the playful Arab or running circles around our blue-coated friends."

Melie opened the door. Her customary grin was gone, and there was a certain slumbering resentment in her face. Martin was overpowered with disgust at the thought of this mountain of flesh brought in to enlighten him on his personal affairs. But jealousy and suspicion had taken possession of him, and he leaned forward eagerly.

"Did you see Lemac go into Mademoiselle Despres' house, Melie?" Muller asked.

"That I did. I watched from here."

"How could you see her house from here?" Martin put in.

"Up-stairs, from the attic," she admitted.

"What made you think of looking?" pressed Muller.

"He asked a lot of questions about her. Pretended he didn't know her. Asked her name and so on. But he was that jealous he gave himself away. He asked whether she loved African there, and when I told him, his face got kinder set."

"Why are you mad at him, Melie?" Martin asked. "That you are. Anybody can see——"

"When I said she was sort of slim, he looked at me and smiled. I'm sure, inside his head, he was making fun of me."

"Go down-stairs, Melie, and get busy—that's all for tonight."

She mumbled her way down the stairs.

Muller, his face bedewed with fine drops of sweat, leaned against the closed door, watching Martin with his alert pig-like eyes.

The ex-sergeant's huge hands clutched and unclutched feverishly. His face was brick-red. He tore at his collar to release the pressure. His whole frame was agitated by convulsive sobs.

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"I can't believe—there's anything—wrong——"

"Melie ain't lying. She did see him go in! She's jealous; it's written all over her face."

"I'll go over and talk to Lemac, and Marie. If it's so—if they love each other, I'll step aside, that's all."

"Yes, and suppose through her schemes she's endangered the bunch! You ain't just got yourself to think of."

"That's right."

"There's the others."

"Perhaps—there's some other reason why he went——"

"Perhaps! Are you crazy?"

"How did they ever get to know each other?"

"Easy. She went to Besançon last Fall, didn't she?"

"Yes, to study music."

"I dare say. Well, I wired from Morteau about it this afternoon. And I was called to the phone a few minutes before you come in. It was our man in Besançon," Muller lied swiftly. "He found out that Lemac was a friend of the old maid aunt where Marie lived. What more do you want? Do you believe she's sick? Do you want to go to Maiche for the doctor!"

"Why didn't you warn me before of what was going on! What's your game?"

"I didn't know myself."

"You knew when I first came in. Why did you play with me all that time. Why didn't you tell me right off they knew each other in Besançon?"

"You believe?"

"Yes, I believe. This is my affair, and I'm going to do what's to be done—without any orders."

Under his growing anger, something seemed to snap in Martin's head. Uncontroled, his rage flared up. His face twisted in pain. He felt hurt in pride, but far more in the sacred heart sentiments, the love that is granted to but one woman in one's life. To have that taken up, and thrown aside as so much worthless junk, crazed him. He had given his whole heart. His hatred was as great. Lemac, a friend? Bah! A man who stole another man's sweetheart was a dog.

He stood swaying, his shirt torn from his heavy muscular chest, the muscles of the jaw corded, his eyes hard and lusterless, a living embodiment of hate.

"What time does that Lemac go on patrol?" he asked.

"He came back from town—with his arm bandaged. He left here less than a hour ago. What are you going to do?"

"I'm going home to get my rifle. Muller, get me an alibi if you can. If you can't it doesn't matter."

The door opened, shut, and he was gone.

Muller, leaning out of the window, saw him running, bareheaded, for his farm.

CHAPTER IX

AGAINST the dim sky, the fir-pine forest loomed, gloomy, immense, a spread of inky blackness, crowding the road into a gray ribbon.

Lemac dismounted, struck a match to glance at his watch.

"Eight fifty-five," he murmured.

He had come from Harquemont immediately upon being assured by Marie Despres that Martin was on his way to Maiche. Having given her the information immediately on his return from Morteau that tonight would see the final blow struck at the smugglers, she had succeeded in deceiving Paul. A vague contempt for himself crept into his reflections. A rather shabby trick to play on a man, the using of a woman, and playing on his finer sentiments. But the end would justify the means.

"They should arrive soon," he thought.

Formulating the wish seemed to have materialized the fact. A column of men appeared at the turn of the cliff. The glistening silver braid showed them to be gendarmes.

Lemac stepped forward.

"Lieutenant Huttin?" he asked.

"Here," the lieutenant replied. "We're on time, you see."

"How many men have you?"

"Thirty. That's all we could get together, the regular force from Morteau, four from Maiche, two or three from neighboring villages, and six men from Pontarlier."

"There are eight customs guards below, on the banks of the Doubs. We'll leave half a dozen men on the crest of the cliffs. They're to let every one that chooses go down, but will alow no one to come up."

"We'll wait your signal."

"As I said before, there must be no fighting. Give strict orders as to that. One shot would create a general battle which would cause many casualties. That's what I wish to prevent. Subtracting from your men the

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six to be left on guard, that leaves twenty-four. Add the eight customs men, that's thirty-two. The boat from the Swiss shore can not be manned by more than a half-dozen. And in the party from Harquemont there are seventeen men. Seeing your numerical superiority, they'll certainly surrender."

"That sounds good," the lieutenant remarked ironically. "But I have been stationed in this district, and I think they'll fight."

"They'll be surprized, for one thing. And their leader will not be there. I've attended to that."

"Very well, this is your show," agreed the other.

"Several of your men are smoking. Order them to stop, and not to light up again."

Huttin turned to his men and spoke briefly. Cigarets and cigars were thrown away, pipes emptied and returned to pockets.

"I'll go down the ladders at my usual time, nine-thirty," Lemac went on. "You take the main road down, as quietly as you can. When the rumpus starts, come on the run. Have your men fix bayonets, they're impressive in the dark."

"Here's your six men," Huttin replied. "I'm on my way. I'll be near the bridge."

"All right."

The party proceeded down the road in the shadow of the trees. Lemac watched them until they became lost to view, then placed the men left him at the head of the trail he had discovered on his night journey to the river.

The last man hidden in the bushes, Lemac returned to the road and made his way toward the ladders. Another three hours and his task would be over.

The night was not extremely dark. Objects could be seen and distinguished some feet away, with that blurred outline, more impressive than daylight. Lemac's thoughts were suddenly interrupted. A man emerged from the bushes on the left, crossed the road, crouching furtively. He carried a rifle. The sentry at the ladders, who was the only customs man on the ridge besides Lemac himself, had a bayonet on his rifle! And he would not be prowling so far off post.

When the man disappeared into the undergrowth on the cliff side, Lemac was after him, silently. Then a twig cracked under his knee. He waited breathlessly. The man ahead did not seem to hear. He hesitated a brief moment on the brink, then disappeared.

"The trail that runs down parallel with the ladders!" thought Lemac, who had scoured the vicinity in a vain effort to find that trail.

But the man was going down. Lemac hurried forward, and saw the dark bulk some distance down the abrupt slope. The customs man lowered himself to the first rock, and to his surprize found the footing comparatively secure. The work of Nature had been supplemented by rests for the feet, made by man, a route as safe as the ladders themselves.

Once Lemac slipped, and the effort to recover himself caused the underbrush to crackle. But the man ahead did not stop. Lemac wondered if he were deaf, the way he crashed forward, unheedingly. Or perhaps the howling of the wind, and the bellowing of the Doubs' waters drowned the sound. But he must avoid loosening gravel or pebbles.

Suddenly the man halted, and sat down, cross-legged, his rifle across his knees. Lemac could see the breech glisten. He braced himself against the cliff and looked about in an attempt to locate the spot. Though he had gone over the edge many yards from the top of the ladders, a freak conformation of the cliff, and the diagonal trail across the steep slope, had brought him within thirty feet of the foot of the first ladder. As his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he distinguished a trail skirting around. The spot where the man sat was connected with the ledge of the first ladder by a very practical trail! The prospect of a struggle on the narrow ledge was not appealing.

The fellow appeared nervous, for he constantly shifted position and slid the breech of the rifle. Lemac cautiously moved down a few feet until he was immediately above. One leap— But the slightest miscalculation would precipitate them both over the brink. Lemac felt that he could not retrace his way up the cliffs again. And so he gathered himself. Luck, he reasoned, would not desert him now.

The man below started violently and looked up. Some one was descending the ladders!

A shot from the rifle!

The shape on the ladders fell, or rather slid down the length of the upright, and

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crashed with a sickening thud. Lemac, aghast, stood petrified. Who, but himself, would have gone down the ladder tonight? As for the murderer, he had thrown away his rifle, and sank forward on his knees, where he cowered, his face in his hands.

Lemac, without hesitation, took the ten-foot drop. As the fellow turned Lemac grasped his wrist, and with a twist, brought him flat on his back. But the fellow was strong. He arched himself on shoulders and feet, and tossed Lemac about. The customs officer reached for his throat, but the other's free hand caught at his wrists. Panting, they struggled, nearer the edge.

The grim combat was wordless. Lemac gained a grip on the throat, but the pressure on his own wrist made him unable to clutch more than weakly at the collar, rip the cloth. Then his hand was suddenly thrust away. The man tore himself free, and both gained their feet.

A brief pause, and they closed. Under the extra weight, Lemac was crushed against the side of the cliff. He braced his foot and pushed, succeeded in freeing himself, then attempted to trip his enemy. But he missed his hold, slipped, and went to his knees. The other fellow was on him, and two hands closed on the customs man's throat. He clawed at the arms, the fingers that slowly tightened. A strange ringing in his ear, and in that first moment of strangulation, his eyeballs seemed to swell to bursting point. His head was over the brink now, and his shoulders——

He lost consciousness.

"LEMAC! LEMAC!"

He opened his eyes and reached up feebly, half-expecting to find his opponent.

"Are you hurt, sergeant?" his own sentry asked.

"Oh—it's—you——"

"I smacked him with the butt of my rifle. That fellow must have a head of iron."

"Knocked cold, is—he?"

"Yes, maybe I cracked his skull, but it had to be done."

"That's right." Lemac sat up. "Anything doing down below?"

"Not yet."

"Hope that shot didn't scare them away."

"No danger. They'll think I got scared and fired at a shadow."

"Who did this fellow get?"

"I don't know. A small man. I stayed back—you told me to let any one come down. Feud among themselves, I guess."

"Feud, nothing! He was after me."

The sentry whistled softly.

"Who did he get," he wondered.

The stunned man groaned.

"Watch him," said Lemac, and made his way along the ledge.

He looked over. Yes, there was the body, held by the bushes a few feet down. He started down the second flight of ladders. At the right level, he paused and struck a match.

Body bent backward, head hanging down, eyes wide open, the wind blowing the blond hair in a cloud about her face, was Marie Despres—dead!

All this Lemac saw in the brief second before the match went out.

"God," he breathed.

Holding to the upright of the ladder, he reached out, grasped the dead girl. He trembled as he placed the slight form over his shoulder. She was still warm, but the feeling of death was unmistakable. He ascended to the ledge, laid the body down, rearranged the clothing.

Ladders of Death—living up to the name! They loomed above him, descended below—and they had claimed another victim. He shivered again, alone with the body on the wind swept platform.

The wind blew through the trees like lost souls seeking salvation.

A step on the ladder above him.

Lemac started, looked up, and followed the dark shape with his eyes, until the man stood before him.

"Who are you?" he asked sharply.

"Martin."

"You—Paul!"

"No, old man Martin."

"I'm Lemac."

"Oh, did you see Marie Despres?"

"Yes."

"Did you stop her?"

"She is stopped," Lemac returned dully.

"I'm glad," breathed the old man.

"What happened?"

"She came after Paul."

"Why?"

"That's none of your business."

Lemac grasped the old man by the shoulders.

"Martin, you must talk! I'm Paul's

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friend, you know that, and she's probably told you what I did."

"Yes." He hesitated a moment, then plunged ahead. "Paul came home and got his rifle. He looked kind of wild. I asked him if he was going down after all, instead of staying with Marie, as he'd said he would, when she sent for him saying she was sick. He laughed and he said like this: 'Don't talk to me about that woman!' I thought they had had a fight over his going down, as they had lots of times before. As soon as he left I went over to see her because it seemed strange his taking his rifle like that. She was there all right. As soon as she hears about the rifle, she turns white and says she's got to find him. I tried to stop her, but she runs out of the house. I followed as quick as I could, but she's a girl, and I'm an old man, so I couldn't catch her. I guess the sentry must have sent her down the road."

"She came to find Paul?"

"Yes. Maybe she'll get in trouble down there, with them customs men and our fellows roaming around. I better go down."

"She's out of trouble, father," said Lemac, "Look!"

He struck a match.

The old man started.

"Dead," Lemac said. "Some one shot her. We have the man."

"What will—Paul—say?" Martin gasped.

"I don't know."

"If he finds the one that did it——"

The old man was sniffling, on the verge of tears. The presence of the body was more potent than a live thing.

"Come," Lemac said.

He led the way to where the sentry stood beside the prostrate form of his assailant.

The man groaned, but was still unconscious.

"Who is he!" old man Martin asked savagely.

For answer, Lemac lighted up the face.

"Paul Martin!"

CHAPTER X

FROM below came a shot, barking sharply above the tumult of clamoring waters. This was the signal arranged, the warning shot from the customs man attacked by the smugglers.

Lemac hurried down the ladders.

He placed a whistle between his teeth and blew three short blasts. The sound echoed faintly from each bank of the Doubs, followed shortly by the click of arms, and the crashing of men through the bushes. The gendarmes and guards were on the way.

All was then silent, save for the natural noise of the night. But Lemac had planned well. He knew that the boat would land near the spot where the sentry had been but a few moments before. With Huttin and his men close behind, he made his way forward in the darkness.

The boat was on the shore. Men were crawling on board, attempting to escape.

"Halt, or we shoot!" warned Lemac.

A lantern was turned, the reflecting light falling on the semi-circle of threatening bayonets.

"They're not customs, they're police!" a hoarse voice shouted.

"Who gave the signal? What's up?" came in confused exclamations.

The customs guards had abandoned their posts and were rushing to help. They turned their lights on the captured men.

"Let every man come forward in turn and deposit at my side any weapon he may possess," Lemac ordered.

This was done. Three gendarmes took possession of the flat boat, which was dragged up on the beach. The ferry-rope was cut, the bundles of merchandize thrown to the ground. This was indeed a big haul. Why had they risked so much on a comparatively clear night? Muller, no doubt had planned to murder the customs leader, as he, Lemac, had tried to get Martin out of the way!

"Well," said Huttin. "We'd better start them for jail."

"Wait a minute!" Lemac turned to the smugglers. "Each man in turn will come and stand so that all can see him. You guards and you gendarmes, look carefully, and you, Huttin, take down their names, their village."

The first man stepped forward. The lantern light was thrown on his face. And so on, down the line.

Then Lemac spoke:

"I've heard a lot of talk up here against the Government. It's not perfect. Nothing is. Those at the head of the nation foresee a crisis soon to come, when France will play a game, which, if lost, means destruction. When that time comes, and your country

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needs you, do you want to be behind bars?"

A murmur of amazement went up.

"You need not answer. But know this, your real enemy is not the customs man or the gendarme. At this moment, in Dijon, the heads of this scheme are under arrest. And your faces are known. Tomorrow, these names will be investigated. You will be identified. If caught again you will receive double penalty. Yes, I have orders to let you go back to your farms. Pick up your arms, I'm through. Let your conscience do the rest."

Dazed, the men moved forward, then back into the shadows, until only the Officers were gathered in the circle of light.

THREE hours later, Lemac sat at his desk, writing. He paused from time to time as though he found the task hard.

Harquemont, April 12, 191—

Monsieur the Director of Customs:

I have tonight concluded the work assigned me. With the help of the police, the smugglers were cornered and captured. According to instructions I allowed them their freedom. I believe that this action will be favorably received by the population of the district.

I regret, however, to report two deaths.

The receiver of smuggled goods in Harquemont, Muller, Henri (innkeeper) died of a heart-stroke when the goods in his cellar were seized.

A woman, Mademoiselle Marie Despres—lived on income—was found dead at the foot of a cliff she had been descending. It was at first believed that she had been hit by a shot fired by Martin, Paul—farmer—of this village, but examination of the body showed that death resulted from a broken spine. The man Martin was therefore released, there being no proof that the detonation of the gun had been the cause of the fall.

Respectfully yours,
CHARLES LEMAC, Sergeant.

CHAPTER XI

IT MAY be recalled that in 1914, a certain Central European Power set out to finish on a large scale what "Mr. Mohammed" had failed to start, in his own small way, in Morocco.

While the dogs of War growled, the discontented tribes in Northern Africa were spawning raiding expeditions. Forgotten, owing to the bigger conflict, a small force on the border struggled to keep the outskirts of an empire.

Charles Lemac blinked as a projectile landed some feet ahead, scattering sand into his eyes.

"Like to be somewhere else?" he asked the man beside him.

The other did not reply. He seemed to be thinking.

"Father wrote that Macard was killed, and many others," he said at last.

"Ah!"

"That was some favor you did them—not sending them to jail!"

Lemac shrugged, wiped his perspiring face.

"One does the best one knows, happen what may."

"Had they gone to prison they might be alive."

Lemac shrugged.

"Would you rather be in jail, and safe?"

"No," Paul Martin replied.

AN OVERLAND CONDUCTOR

by Wo Witasu

FORTY-FIVE years ago passengers on the "Overland Railway," now known as the Union Pacific, surrendered their tickets to "Tommy" Cahoon, who always wore his hat tipped back on his head.

As Tommy in 1869 had seven arrows shot into him and was twice scalped—one small piece being taken from the side of his head—while fishing at the bridge a mile east of Fort Sidney, with a partner who was also shot but not scalped, the reason for his breezy manner of adjusting his head gear is obvious.

He was an object of great interest to "towerists" from "the States," who, as he remarked, "could ask more —— fool questions in a minit than I kin answer in a year."

Incidentally, he lost his scalp to two boys of sixteen, part of a band who were endeavoring to run off the horses from the "Post" when Lieut. Bubb of the Eighth Inf. commanded.

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Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

SOME interesting data on deflected or stopped bullets. What we were in doubt about in the first version of Raymond S. Spears' story was not the bullet's failure to penetrate but the man's failure to be bruised or even to feel the impact.

Alvin, Texas.

About the matchsafe stopping the bullet. Absolutely no question about the bullet being stopped by the heavy copper pipe brazed section as described; stop anything up to heavy automatic pistol projectile. This matchsafe would resist about three or four times as much as the steel spectacle-case which saved Theodore Roosevelt's life, when he was shot with an automatic in the 1912 presidential campaign by the fanatic. That steel case had only thin steel plate, probably not 1-16th of an inch thick, both sides together. This matchbox, of tough, hard copper would stop the bullet.

IN ANY event, bullets are exceedingly freakish things. The pistols shoot only from 100 to 400 or so pounds *hard*—strike those blows. If you talk over the telephone with the pistol and firearms sharp in New York police headquarters, he will be able to tell you perhaps a hundred stories of bullets that ought to have killed, but didn't, or which not to have killed, but did. Watches, corset steels, jackknives, suspender buckles—coins—everything that men carry in their pockets, or women wear, of metal, has stopped bullets, or (as you suggest) also, deflected bullets.

I remember, in my New York reporting days, seeing an Italian girl down Roosevelt St., who was shot several times, and they found one bullet crumpled against a corset steel which had "cupped" around it—a .32 lead pistol bullet. I found a .45-90-300 bullet jammed against the hip-bone of a deer that I killed—ought to have gone clear through in any direction. Heavy clothing over and under a coin or watch "cushions," takes up the force of a bullet. You can't shoot shot through the Winter plumage of a wild goose on its breast. It isn't the force of the blow that counts; it's the penetration (a too-general statement, of course); but a coin will stop a bullet against a yielding background, where the bullet would go through four times the thickness of the metal against a solid background. And not only would the matchbox of itself stop the bullet, but the yielding clothes, the tough skin and the resilient bone and muscle would all take up the force, even of a much heavier projectile and more powerful charge than the relatively light weapon used by the river pirate gambler in shooting the man with the pearl.

SPORTSMEN tell thousands of tales of bullets that performed out of expected routine. In the old days it used to be said "a ball tangles up" in

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bear hair, the truth of which lies in the springing resistance of hair to the impact of a round ball. The flat-point projectile is more apt to stop than a round point, and a sharp point will split its way through where a flatpoint might stop. The .22 Hi Power projectile disappears, literally, in air—as though it smashed up on a chunk of hard atmosphere. It splinters into a charge of ragged shot on thin boards. But the slow, light and blunt pistol bullet may bound back. I shot my .45-90-300 at an elm tree once. The bullet hit it square, full force. That bullet came back past my head—simply bounded back like a rubber ball, the same effect as the pistol bullet against the yielding background of clothes, skin and bone, although the flesh was not resilient. Literally, bounded from the springy, tough elm wood which it hit with a blow of perhaps a thousand pounds (I've forgotten the exact figures).

I'VE shot thousands of times, targets, game, .22s to .45s, and read a lot more than I've shot—and I'll believe almost anything they tell about bullets' erratic or unusual effects. A friend of mine shot at a red squirrel with a .44 rifle. He used a home-molded bullet. He found that bullet lying on the log under the squirrel.

But there isn't any chance or freakishness in the bullet that was stopped in that home-made, heavy pipe brazed matchbox. Hit fair, it couldn't penetrate the box, much less the skin. Covering so much space, it might not even badly bruise the skin—though probably would, depending on the clothes worn. Men have fought for hours, not knowing they had been hit.

If I was home, with my data, I could cite a good many parallels to the behavior of the bullet I described.—R. S. SPEARS.

ONE of you thought he recognized the scene of one of Leonard H. Nason's stories and wrote to Mr. Nason to find out. Here's the reply, showing that comrade McCarns did know the scene and that he and Nason served in the same outfit. Any others of you who are or were of the 76th Field Artillery will be interested to know that the material for Mr. Nason's stories was collected while he was a member of that organization during the Great War and some of you doubtless knew him personally and will be glad to renew acquaintance.

Chicago, Ill.

Camp-Fire and Compadre McCarns in particular:

Well, old-timer, I wondered how long it would be before some one would sound off and ask about some tale of mine, and either claim that I had maligned his character or else that my geography was poor. I admit, now, freely, that I am highly flattered that you spotted the scene of "A Can of Jam" so closely. Montzeville it was, and you and I were in the same outfit. I was cracking biscuit in John S. Jadwin's Angel Choir at that time. Well, well. And to think that we were there, under that hill together, in the rain and the mud and the cold, and never knew we'd meet around this Fire. I wouldn't have given a Russian nickel for my chance of meeting any one again right then, would you?

I certainly am glad you spoke up. The curse of being in the regulars was that the men came from all over the country, and when they were discharged they dropped out of sight. Since I left the outfit in October, 1918, I have met only three men besides yourself—Frog Fortier, Shortie Myrover and Cut Glass Flynn. Know any of 'em? You stay out in the light where I can see you; I may need to call on you for corroboration one of these days. Yours in the old outfit.—LEONARD H. NASON, Battery A, 76th F. A.

DISCUSSIONS started in "A. A." sometimes, as in this case, overflow into "Camp-Fire." Sometimes it's difficult to tell in which of the two departments some item belongs. But we go on the theory that you don't care which one it appears in if it's interesting.

Lima, Peru.

Letters from H. R. Bridges in "A. A." of Feb. 20, and from G. L. Saxby, in Jan. 30, together with the answers from Capt. Dingle and Mr. Brown, got me interested because of a letter which I sent to the "Fire" a few months ago, on the same general subject, and which is doubtless awaiting its fate in the cache. As the matter it contained is apropos, I am reproducing some of it, and amplifying it a bit, so as to give somewhat fuller replies to the requests of the two gentlemen above cited, for information about some of the great clippers.

If I trespass on the ground already covered by experts who have already answered, it is only because the information I have is woven in with some of the matter which they have submitted, and of course without the slightest wish to muss up the quarter-deck.

IN THE New York *Herald* (Correspondents' Section of Sunday edition) bearing the date of April 2, 1922, I find a letter from Captain Arthur C. Chipman, which I brief as follows: "In 1852, the clipper ship *Northern Light*, commanded by my uncle, Captain Freeman D. Hatch, a Cape Cod man, made the voyage from San Francisco to Boston in 76 days 6 hours—a record never beaten by a sailing ship. The New York *Clipper's* list of remarkable records always contained an account of this voyage." The writer adds that until very recently a survivor of the crew, a Portuguese, was still alive in New Bedford.

Sailing on Sept. 14, 1849, the clipper *Oriental*, Capt. N. B. Palmer, on her maiden voyage, New York to Hongkong, madel the run in 109 days. She left Hongkong Jan. 1, 1850, and reached New York 81 days out. On her second voyage, under Capt. T. D. Palmer (brother of N. B. Palmer, who has retired) she made Hongkong 81 days out of New York.

The best passage between China and London in 1852 was made by the Salem clipper *Witch of the Wave*, Capt. Willett. She made the run Whampoa to Java Head in the record time of 7 days 12 hours; loaded 19,000 chests of tea; left Canton River Jan. 5; took pilot off Dungeness April 4; and docked in London 90 days out. Best day's run 338 nautical miles.

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In 1853 the *Challenger* (British), Shanghai to London, made it in 110 days, and won £4,000 from the American clippers *Nightingale* (named for Jenny Lind), and the *John Bertram*.

In 1853, Boston to San Francisco, the *Westward Ho* logged 400 knots one day, and 388 on another.

The *Cutty Sark* holds the tea-clipper record for day's work, and once did 362 and 363 nautical miles on two consecutive days. *Thermopylæ's* best was 358, running her easting down to 44 S, 68 E.

THE greatest tea race was in 1866. The leaders in the run from Foo Chow to the Downs, were *Ariel* 99 days, *Taeping* 99 days, *Serica* 99 days, and *Fiery Cross* and *Taitsing* each 101 days out.

Thermopylæ is, and has always been, considered by British seamen, as the fastest sailing ship ever launched. She was very fast in light airs, and would make 7 knots when a man could walk her decks with a lighted candle. At 13 to 13½ knots a boy could handle the wheel. But *Cutty Sark*, with strong beam or quartering breezes, is claimed to have been able to beat *Thermopylæ*, or any other ship ever built, according to British opinion.

On *Thermopylæ's* maiden voyage, she left Gravesend at 5 A.M., Nov. 7, 1868; passed the Lizard Nov. 8; crossed the Line Nov. 28, 21 days out; sighted Cape Otway Jan. 7, 61 days out; and anchored in Port Phillip on Jan. 9, 63 days out; with a run from pilot to pilot of 60 days.

The general opinion of the authority whom I quote, after he had made comparisons of numerous logs of *Cutty Sark* and *Thermopylæ*, follows:

1. *Thermopylæ* was at her best in moderate to light winds.
2. *Cutty Sark* was her superior in strong breezes.
3. *Thermopylæ* was slightly better to windward. *Cutty Sark* off the wind.
4. China voyages suited *Thermopylæ*, and Australian voyages the *Cutty Sark*.

My authority differs from Captain Dingle regarding the fate of the *Thermopylæ*, and says that she was towed out of the Tagus by two ships of the Portuguese Government, and torpedoed, on Oct. 13, 1907.

IN SPITE of the fact that *Cutty Sark* is credited with being, in heavy breezes, the fastest ship ever launched, the same author says; "No vessels propelled by wind alone have ever traveled so fast through the water as the Mackay cracks; *Staghound*, *Flying Cloud*, *Sovereign of the Seas*, *Flying Fish*, *Westward Ho*, *Great Republic;* and the four built for the Black Ball Line, *Lightning*, *James Baines*, *Champion of the Seas*, and the *Donald Mackay*.

Supporting this statement in the case of one at least of the great ships, is the following statement in an article in the New York *Herald* (Sunday edition, early part of 1922), in one of their special sections, regarding the collecting of models, by Frank L. Curtis. Mr. Curtis says: "*Lightning*, the *fastest ship that ever sailed*, left on her maiden trip, Boston to Liverpool, Feb. 18, 1854, and made her destination in 13 days 19½ hours. Her log for March 1 is historic: Wind south. Strong gales. Bore away for the North Channel. Carried away foretopsail and lost jib. Hove log several times and found the ship going through the water 18 to 18½ knots. Lee rail under water and rigging slack. Distance in 24 hours 436 miles (or nearly 510 land miles)."

My hitherto unnamed authority, is Basil Lubbock, whose book "The China Clippers," was published in Glasgow, 1914, by James Brown & Son. It is not a book for those who are not familiar with the sea, as although it contains many interesting anecdotes of these great old ships and their racing skippers, it is distinctly a book for seamen, who will find it a joy forever. It contains cuts showing these good old ships, diagrams of the lines and sail-plans of several, and the records of famous tea-races from their beginning until the steam-pot crowd put them out of business.—G. G. LANSING.

IF ANY one living ought to know about the Pawnee Scouts it's our comrade Captain L. H. North.

Columbus, Nebraska.

In an article in the February 20, 1923, number of *Adventure*, Mr. Edward L. Sabin says of the Pawnee Scouts that eventually a battalion was formed, each company under a chief and all under the white commander.

The Pawnee Scouts were regularly enlisted soldiers with fifty men in each company and a captain and one lieutenant (white men) in command and Major Frank North in command of the Battalion. They were issued and wore the same clothing that the soldiers of the regular army wore and as to cutting the seat from the pants or wearing their hats on their ponies' heads, that is all bosh.

I am sending you a copy of a letter written to my brother by General Crook.—CAPT. L. H. NORTH.

HERE is the letter from General Crook:

Hd. Qrs. Department of the Platte in the Field.
Camp Robinson, Nebraska
April 19, 1877.

Major Frank North
Comndg. Pawnee Scouts
Sidney, Nebraska

DEAR SIR:

I think it only just and appropriate to thank you for your excellent behavior during the time of your stay in the Military Service under my command and to say that the soldierlike conduct and discipline of the Pawnee Scouts is the most eloquent testimony that could be adduced to prove your fitness for the position you have held as their commanding officer.

I remain Very Respectfully
Your obedient servant
(signed) George Crook
Brigadier General.

IN CONNECTION with his serial beginning in this issue Harold Lamb gives us some interesting information, particularly as to Chinese civilization in comparison with ours. And he brings up a question that rather jolts those of us not so familiar with the facts—was Genghis Khan greater than Alexander, Cæsar and Napoleon? He makes out a strong case.

Berkeley, California.

First, as to Cathay, Marco Polo and others of his day, returning from the elder kingdom of China,

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used the word Cathay, deriving it from "Kitai." Until very recently the nomads of Central Asia spoke of the Chinese as "Kitans."

According to the letter of history, it is true that in the time of the "Three Palladins" China itself was made up of the three empires of the Kitai and Kin and the Sung. But our ancestors in Europe knew it as Cathay and I have used this name.

IN THE day of the Three Palladins—1175 to 1220 A.D.—Cathay was a civilization superior in almost every respect to that of feudal Europe. In extent of trade, in inventions, size and comforts of its great cities, in arts, weapons and warfare, Cathay was as far ahead of a Christian state (England, for instance) as the present United States is ahead of Mexico. Probably China to-day does not possess more advatages—certainly not more riches—than China of the thirteenth century, which we know as Cathay.

When Marco Polo came back from Cathay, his tales of the great empire were believed to be pure lies by Europeans—who kept on, by the way, cherishing that opinion until a couple of hundred years ago.

THE *Adventure* editors once asked me for a list of the inventions known to the ancient Chinese. Having had time to look the matter up, meanwhile, here are some:

Compass (pointing *south*, incidentally: Chinese word for compass is "south pointing cart"); about 1000 B.C.; musical instrument, something like a pipe organ, 2000 B.C.; repeating cross-bow (spoken of previously at Camp-Fire) about 300 A.D.; printing, of course; paper money; astronomical instruments (globes, astrolabes, etc.). The Chinese could foretell eclipses in 2000 B.C. At least the two royal astrologers of that period were beheaded for not warning the emperor of an eclipse of the sun. An eclipse recorded by astrologers of Cathay in 800 has been confirmed by European research.

Powder, at least 100 B.C. As to this, the Chinese had powder and used it—for firecrackers and "fire-pots" in sieges—a thousand years or so before a European inventor hit upon it. But *not* guns, of any description. Cannon were not known in China until long after the time of Genghis Khan, and then were introduced by way of Persia. As late as 1650 or thereabouts we find Jesuit missionaries showing the Chinese emperor how to make cannon, for use in his wars.

SECOND, as to Genghis Khan.

Almost always, when an empire rises to great power and its civilization begins to decay, a race of nomads appears out of the waste places of the world and humbles it. Mr. Wells, in his "Outline of History," has said this very well—although Sir Henry Howorth used almost the same words a generation ago.

"Whenever civilization seems to be choking amidst its weeds of wealth and debt and servitude, when its faiths seem rotting into cynicism . . . the nomad drives in like a plough to break up the festering stagnation and release the world to new beginnings."

Such desert conquerors smashed Babylon, Rome, Persia and Byzantium (the Arabs in this case) and finally Cathay.

And the story of these conquerors has seldom been told, and then usually badly. Our stupid histories have fed us up with the details of degenerate Rome (and Babylon and Constantinople). Even the movies have taken a hand in telling us what bad actors Nero and his successors were. But when it comes to the true story of the nomads—the wandering Goths, the fiery Arabs and the conquering Mongols—the pages of history are blank. It makes a man mad.

GENGHIS KHAN is almost unique among the conquerors of our world, because he came out of the desert. No armies were ready to his hand: no cities offered him the thews and sinews of war. He had had no schooling, of the book variety.

When he was fifteen or sixteen this chief was at the head of a tribe of forty thousand tents, about two hundred and fifty thousand souls, all told. He was surrounded by enemies. The northern Gobi desert was—and is—much like our northwestern plains. A place of extremes of cold and heat, of a never ending struggle for existence.

Out of these high prairies, just below the Arctic Circle, the Mongols rode to the conquest of China, and—as we know them to-day—the Himalayas, Afghanistan, Persia and northern India. Eventually his followers overcame the Russians, the Magyars, and defeated the Hungarians and the knighthood of Germany in Silesia.

And our schoolbook histories have almost nothing to say about all this. What they had said is mostly wrong. But men like Theodore Roosevelt and Mr. Wells have rendered tribute to the Mongols.

FOR one thing, we have gained the idea from historians that the Mongols were a great mass of barbarians that conquered their enemies by weight of numbers and a vague kind of ferocity. As a matter of fact the Mongol Horde numbered only a hundred and fifty thousand horsemen. It had no infantry. Sometimes, of course, it had allies.

Instead of having numbers on his side, Genghis Khan usually had the smaller army, and displayed strategic powers of the highest order. It is rather amusing that our histories should try to teach us that the Mongols and Tatars were unthinking barbarians when our language uses the phrase "catching a Tatar" to imply a clever trick.

TO RANK Genghis Khan with Cæsar and Alexander would raise quite a clamor of protest. Just by way of starting the debate—both the Roman and the Macedonian were generals of great empires that had been established before they were born, while the Mongol had only a tribe of herders and cattlemen to work with. Also Cæsar and Alexander were products of a high civilization—both carefully schooled. Their conquests did not extend as far as those of the Mongols. (By the way, neither of them had to tackle the great wall of China.) The enemies they encountered were of a lower order of intelligence—always, in Cæsar's case, usually in Alexander's. They did not find in their path such cities as Pekin, Samarkand, Bokhara and Herat.

It usually happens that the feeling of the men of an army for their leader is the best possible indication of the leader's character. No man, the proverb runs, is a hero to his valet. ¶ Certainly no commander ever fooled his enlisted men.

While Cæsar and Alexander were trusted and admired by the soldiers who followed them—Alexander particularly—both had to deal with mutinies

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at various times. Genghis Khan was beloved by his warriors. It is said that, in a battle, the Khan would give his horse to an injured man. One of his followers was frozen to death holding a fur windbreak over the sleeping king during a blizzard. In the annals of the Chinese—his enemies—appears the phrase that he led his armies like a god.

It looks as if Alexander were a greater strategist than the Mongol, but as a leader of men and as a conqueror Genghis Khan ranks ahead of him. And of Napoleon, too, for that matter. In comparing the achievements of men of other ages we have no standard except results. The empire of Napoleon fell to pieces before he died, and before that—there was Waterloo, you know. And then crossing the Alps is not quite the same as taking an army over the Himalayas.

THE story of Genghis Khan is one of those things that grow on you in writing, and for the last year I seem to have gathered enough knowledge of the Mighty Manslayer to try to tell his story. As to that, it is a story that never will be told in full because the Mongols, unlike most nations, kept no annals. There are no "tombs" to be opened. So one has to proceed from Mongol myth—the few legends, anecdotes, that have come down to us—to the histories of the enemies of the Mongols. That is, to what the Perisan, Arabic, Greek, Chinese and Russian chroniclers have said about Genghis Khan.

The man who follows this twisting thread comes upon a rare tale. For one thing, the character of the nomad chief; for another, the very shrewd Chinese philosopher who was his guide and friend. And the seven heroes, and Kasar, the archer. Also the Prester John of Asia *motif*—(the Asian rendering).

NO WORK for three years has been so full of interest in the doing! The tale is imaginative for the most part, but is based on events that actually took place. Prester John for instance—legendary as far as medieval Europe is concerned, but a real king in the annals of Asia.

The "pony express" of Genghis Khan in the Gobi is rather interesting for the reader who remembers the pony mail of the far West in the late sixties and seventies. I'm working up some information as far as possible on the relative speed made by the Mongol couriers. They covered more ground in a day than our express riders, but conditions were in their favor.

Mingan is one of the vague shadows of history—a prince of Cathay who acted as guide, councilor and friend to Genghis Khan and his sons, and who, in fact, built up the wisest and most enduring part of the Mongol system of government. Ye Lui Kutsai Mingan is known to our half-brained present day historians as Yelui Chut-sai.—HAROLD LAMB.

SOMETHING from William Wells in connection with his story in this issue:

Redmond, Oregon.

It has occurred to me that I should explain a little, especially the language used in telling the story.

AS YOU know, the vocabulary of the plains Indians is limited, they are not the orators they are commonly supposed to be, and they make extensive use of the sign language which is common to all the tribes.

As Jim Baker once told me, "An Injun will tell a long story in four grunts and the rest with his fingers," which leaves one who tells their stories free to interpret the sign language as he sees fit. Now, the sign language is symbolic, and the way I have told the story is the nearest that I can come to rendering the terms used into English, most of the signs being very primitive—the Indians have got the old English novelists like Fielding beat to a whisper when it comes to plain speaking.

Nelson Yarnell told me a story of what a Shoshone chief said (in the sign language) to General Crook after the fight on the Rosebud in which Crook was so badly licked by the Sioux, and I wish I could tell it to you, but it is too rich—the postal authorities might get after me.

As for "Crow Vengeance" it is fiction, but based on yarns that I have heard myself from Indians, or that have been told me by white men that have lived among them.—WM. WELLS.

THIS is very short and very much to the point:

San Diego, California.

The L. B. Shultz story about "Billy the Kid" is absurd. I know, for I played a prominent hand in the affair. Your Mr. F. R. Bechdolt gave a correct account of the affair as to the "Kid's" capture and death.—CHARLES A. SIMPSON.

BACK to December, 1920. Evidently Major Ostrander sent to Mr. M. S. Garreston, secretary of The American Bison Society, some newspaper clippings about the reported finding of a large herd of wild buffalo in Canada. Here is Mr. Garretson's reply:

My dear Major Ostrander: Thank you very kindly for your thoughtfulness in sending me those clippings in regard to that *phantom* herd of buffalo. I now have about fifty just like them and they are still coming, to say nothing about the grist of letters asking for information in regard to it. There is little or nothing new in regard to it, it pops up usually every other year, only this year it seems to be more of a contagious nature than formerly, having spread to about every printing-shop in the United States. I enclose you a copy of my views in regard to the item.—M. S. GARRETSON.

After branding this herd of buffalo as a myth, Mr. Garretson goes on:

The Canadian engineer, Mr. F. H. Kitto, did not discover anything new; what he did was, he saw and counted some of the animals in the well-known herd of wood bison on the same old range where they have been for hundreds of years and for many years under the protection of the Dominion Government. He did not go North up into the Mackenzie River basin, but South from Fort Smith in the direction of Peace River and saw some buffalo near the place where Harry V. Radford killed a wood bison bull in 1909. Just where Mr. Kitto put in his time

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after he saw the buffalo I do not know, but he did not see any buffalo after he left the wood bison range, which lies West of Slave River, between the Great Slave Lake and Peace River.

The country of the Mackenzie River basin is a large one, remote and not very inviting; nevertheless it has been crossed and recrossed by numerous travelers and is more or less known to the Northwest Mounted Police. This mysterious herd of buffalo is indeed a fantom one as it has never been seen, leaves no tracks or sign and has made a successful hide-out for nearly forty years. This herd is supposed to be the one that escaped the cordon of hide-hunters in the Winter of 1883, went up into the Dominion of Canada and never returned. This herd was at that time estimated to be from fifty to seventy-five thousand in number. Now if you have the time and patience, take your pencil and figure out the natural increase in a herd of fifty thousand buffalo for thirty-seven years and you will get an idea as to the approximate number in that *fantom* herd that has never been seen by any one.—M. S. GARRETSON.

Alongside the above in our cache was the following, apparently from the New York *World:*

The American Bison Society, the American Humane Society, Albany, and Dr. W. T. Hornaday, Director of the Zoological Park, New York, have all protested through the *World* against the killing of one of the largest herds of American bison in the United States which now roam the plains of Antelope Island in the Great Salt Lake.

MANY suggestions have been received why this herd should not be killed off. The American Bison Society has for the past several months tried to save them by persuading the State of Utah or the Federal Government to establish prisons on the island and allow the prisoners to herd and sell the excess bulls, according to Edmund Seymour, President. Mr. Seymour continues that the young buffalo have a very high commercial value as a food animal, leather, wool, buffalo robes, low cost of production and the advantage obtained by crossing the buffalo with domestic cattle. The American Humane Society, according to Mr. Seymour, has been trying to buy this herd for some time past. Mr. Hornaday states that something should be done against the killing of these animals, because it would be a great loss to zoological parks and similar institutions.

THESE statements followed the publication of a report that sixty permits to kill the buffalo on part of the John E. Dooley estate had been issued. The Bison Society does not want to see the 265 members of this almost extinct species killed, and Mr. Seymour said that if the island could be maintained as a reservation for them his organization would join with the American Humane Society or the Utah Government in their efforts to save the herd.

"No true sportsman," he continued, "would hunt bison in this manner. It is just like going out into one's barnyard and killing cattle. It would be a very easy matter to get some good cattle men to drive the herd into a trap for capture, if there is no other way of saving them.

"If the Utah Government would transfer their Federal Prison, which is now in Salt Lake City, to the island it would help both the prisoners and the city. The prison being in the city endangers the people and also harms the prisoners themselves. If they were over on the island they would be in the open, could herd the buffalo and do extensive agriculture work. By selling the excess young bulls the prisoners could more than keep themselves and their families too.

"AS A food animal the meat is very much like beef, possesses all the palatable and nutritious qualities of beef, with something of a game flavor, and will always command a good price as a novelty and Christmas delicacy. The hide, for purposes of leather of all kinds, is fully as desirable, if not more so, than beefskins. The buffalo hide is pre-eminently fitted to withstand the weather. The teepees of the Indian were made almost exclusively from the hide of the buffalo, and were often beautifully colored and decorated. These hides, however, are too valuable to be used for such a purpose in these days, but would make excellent army shoes or harnesses, or could be utilized for any purpose for which cow hides are now used.

"THE advantage of the buffalo over cattle is, that it has a true wool similar to that of sheep. Buffalo wool is stronger than the average wool, and for a long time it would be in demand at a high price as a novelty. If it could be obtained in quantity there would be a good market for it for the manufacture of articles not requiring to be dyed in lighter colors.

"The buffalo robe, the most valuable of all products from the buffalo, however, is the combination of hide and wool which makes the well-known buffalo robe one of the most serviceable and warmest robe ever produced by any animal. Should the Government and the States, in ten or twenty reservations, install herds of buffalo, which could naturally increase, in times of war or great distress or famine these animals could be used for food.

"The cost of production is very low. The buffalo is an animal accustomed to forage for itself. It is acclimated to the semi-arid plains, can go long without water, and can graze where cattle could hardly exist. It is accustomed to the blizzards and snows of the West, and, unlike the cattle, goes into the storm and through it, and is not driven before and destroyed by it. It is a little hard to tame and domesticate it, but in time a change will happen in this respect.

"In some States cattle men cross the buffalo with the common cattle, and thus establish a race which stand the high altitude and severe Winters as the buffalo themselves do. They thrive and do better on less food than other cattle. They put on more flesh for the amount of food they eat than any other animal, and do not carry the extra fat that is common on all cattle. Their tallow is also more valuable than that of cattle.

"AS A last word for the saving of this greatest and noblest of all American big game animals, which almost became extinct a few years ago, I would like to add: It is identified with the settlement of our country. To commemorate their early struggles and dangers is a sufficient reason why this animal should be preserved to the descendants of

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these early settlers. The mothers of those days—some of whom are still alive—may remember when they were given, in their courting days, good, thick buffalo robes to keep them warm, and I hope now the ladies will vote to preserve the buffalo. Even the American Indian has a right to demand that his history shall be preserved, and that this animal, which was part of his daily life, and furnished his food, clothing, shelter and fuel, shall not become extinct.

"The educational and historic value of living buffalo is invaluable to our youth. We build institutes and Museums of Natural History to preserve this wonderful animal in mounted specimens of the animals, spending millions therefor. Every city and every public park should have live buffalo to show the young people. Hardly anything attracts them as much."

The island is composed of about 35,000 acres, about 5,000 belonging to the Government and the rest to the Dooley estate.

And now read the following. Apparently this herd was not the Canadian one referred to by Mr. Garretson, but it's branded as equally a fantom. We had some discussion on surviving bison at Camp-Fire once before, but the wonderful detail of this story, if it is not based on fact, would make it amusing. Anyhow the part about how useful bison are if there are any bison is interesting.

Here is something that will interest the Camp-Fire readers. Did you ever hear—or know—that the story of that Salt Lake buffalo herd is a fake? I was not prepared to say anything about it, as I didn't know there was any such herd on an island in the lake. The letter was sent by a New York friend to me. Seems to me the matter ought to be given publicity to set at rest any idea that those buffalo are going to be slaughtered. It's good newspaper fodder, of course, but a darn poor sort of a story to give publicity.—E. A. Brininstool.

THE following letter from William L. Warner, of *Field and Stream*, not only has my own hearty endorsement but will, I am sure, have that of ninety-nine per cent. of you. The point is, are you going just to grumble about the anti-weapon laws or are you going to *do* something about it?

Editor of *Adventure:* The agitation for pistol prohibition is a question that the American citizen must give serious consideration. *Adventure* readers will be especially interested in this movement to take the pistol and revolver from the hands of the honest citizen in an attempt to take it away from the crook. Any man who has been around at all, knows that no law will take the gun away from the crook, but that such a law will take the gun from the honest citizen, leaving him, who once had the protection of the revolver, helpless when attacked by the thug or bandit.

UNLESS Americans show more interest in their personal liberties than they have up to the present time, legislation will take the protection of the pistol from them. I am not crying "wolf, wolf!" Consider the following facts: There is now in committee in the United States Senate, a bill that would prohibit the sale or transportation of the revolver or pistol throughout the United States. This is the notorious Shields Bill. Some dozen of our State legislatures have similar bills before them. The newspapers are filled with propaganda against the revolver. Who is paying for it, no one knows.

Adventure and *Field and Stream* have put up a hard fight against this anti-pistol crowd. We merely ask them, *would* it disarm the crook? If it would, it would have to solve the following problems:

1. *How Would It Be Possible To Find And Confiscate The Hundreds of Thousands Of Pistols In The Possession Of Criminals?*

2. *How Could Such Laws Prevent the Smuggling In Of Foreign Pistols To Supply The Demands Made By The Crook And The Unlawful?*

3. *What Is To Prevent The Dishonest Gunsmith Or Any Mechanic From Manufacturing Pistols For The Use Of The Criminal Element?*

4. *How Could Any Anti-Pistol Bill Prevent A Crook From Buying A Rifle Or Shot-Gun, sawing Off The Barrel, Cutting The Stock To The Pistol Grip From This, Thereby Making His Own Gun?*

5. *Where Would The Millions Of Dollars Be Raised By The Government To Employ The Thousands Of Officials Necessary Even To Attempt Enforcement Of This Law?*

More Taxes could be the only answer to this question. It is certain that the people would never be willing to pay the price.

Any one with no more intelligence than a duck knows full well that these questions can not be answered affirmatively by the anti-pistol crowd. *Field and Stream* is appealing to its readers, the sportsmen of the country and to all good citizens to help them fight this campaign against pistol prohibition. We have told them that we believe they can achieve the best results by the following course of action:

First—Contribute to our fund against the anti-pistol propaganda.

Second—Send letters to your local newspaper telling your side of the case, giving them *Field and Stream* literature in the matter. Write us and we will send you all the material for your needs.

Third—Get your friends to sign a petition, copies of which should be sent to your Congressman and us.

Fourth—Join the organization that *Field and Stream* is forming so that you can keep fully informed and use your individual strength where it will count the most. (There will be no dues to pay.)

If any *Adventure* reader feels that he has a loose dollar or two, let him put it in an envelope and mail it to the Editor of *Field and Stream*, 25 West 45th St., New York City. This money will be used for only one purpose—that is, to lick the crowd that would take another liberty away from the American citizen.

Yours for freedom,
William L. Warner.
FIELD AND STREAM

Be marking down your favorite stories for our annual vote.—A. S. H.

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VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES TO ANY READER

These services of *Adventure*, mostly free, are open to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules,** thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Encloses a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible **false alarms** to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 24 T Wharf, Boston, Mass., can supply Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL BUY: April, May, June, July, Aug., Sept., Oct., and Nov., 1911.—Address NORMAN W. GOSLIN, Widener Bldg., Philadelphia, Pa.

WILL SELL: All issues from June, 1911, to Dec. 30th, 1922. All in good condition. No single copies. What offers?—Address G. S. MARTIN, 17 Delaware Ave., Toronto, Canada.

WILL SELL: March, June, Oct., Nov., Dec., 1913; Feb., March, April, May, Sept., Dec., 1914; March, Nov., 1915; July, 1916. Best offer.—Address RAY E. ROBESON, Hill Ave., Holland, Ohio.

WILL SELL: March, April, June, Aug., Mid-Oct., Nov., Dec., 1917; All 1918; all 1920; all 1920, except Mid-June and Mid-July. Best offer takes lot.—Address T. A. JENKINS, Winnie, Texas.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers, *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3,000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations

Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the first issue of each month. Address letters regarding stations to J. Cox.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, unstamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

(*See Lost Trails in Next Issue*)

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of the last issue of each month.

Addresses

Camp Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.

1—3. The Sea. In Three Parts
4, 5. Islands and Coasts. In Two Parts
6, 7. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
8. Australia and Tasmania
9. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
10. New Guinea
11. Philippine Islands
12. Hawaiian Islands and China
13. Japan
14—16. Asia. In Three Parts
17—24. Africa. In Eight Parts
25. Turkey and Asia Minor
26—28. Balkans. In Three Parts
29. Scandinavia
30. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
31—33. South America. In Three Parts
34. Central America
35, 36. Mexico. In Two Parts
37—43. Canada. In Seven Parts
44. Alaska
45. Baffinland and Greenland
46—50. Western U. S. In Five Parts
51—54. Middle Western U. S. In Four Parts
55—60. Eastern U. S. In Six Parts
Radio
Mining and Prospecting
Tropical Forestry
Weapons, Past and Present. In Three Parts
Salt and Fresh Water Fishing
Aviation
Standing Information
Lost Trails

Scenic Wonders of Montana

BEAR Tooth Range, Grasshopper Glacier, the Flathead and Big Horn countries—the very names have a picturesque coloration:

Question:—"I am going to spend quite a bit of time with a camera in Montana and the northern Rocky Mountains, and would like to have you answer the following questions:

What are the wildest and most isolated portions of these districts, and can you mention any out-of-the-way waterfalls, streams or creeks and their location definitely?

What are the most mountainous and picturesque

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sections? Is there any danger of meeting dangerous animals or reptiles in these sections? If so, what arms would you recommend for adequate protection?"—JOSEPH J. URBAIN, Chicago, Ill.

Answer, by Mr. Davis:—One of the most picturesque as well as isolated districts in the northern Rocky Mountains is the Bear Tooth Range in Carbon and Park Counties in south-central Montana. Red Lodge, Carbon County, is the best outfitting point, I think.

Peaks in the Bear Tooth Mountains are the highest in Montana. There are very striking waterfalls on the east fork of the Rosebud. There are also some glaciers in this range, including one called the Grasshopper Glacier by reason of the fact that millions of insects have been frozen in the ice.

One of the most impressive views on a titanic scale is from the top of the Bear Tooth plateau. One climbs mountains for two days and then comes out on the "Roof of the World." This is a plateau with an elevation of more than ten thousand feet that extends as far as the eye can see. Clouds and vast mountain ranges are below one.

I suggest you write the Red Lodge Chamber of Commerce for a booklet on this region. It is practically unknown to tourists, and in my opinion has never been given the recognition it deserves.

One of the wild and most isolated mountain districts is along the main range of the Rocky Mountains in northern Powell and southern Flathead Counties. Going in over the Northern Pacific, you would outfit at Ovando, Powell County. I am not personally familiar with this district. I suggest you write the Supervisor of the Flathead National Forest at Kalispell, Montana, regarding this region.

One of the most beautiful cañons in the West is the so-called "Gate of the Mountains," on the Missouri River twenty miles north of Helena. This cañon was named by Lewis and Clark. It is seven or eight miles in length, and the cliffs rise sheer from the water's edge for several hundred feet. It is not isolated, however.

Another scenic cañon in an isolated district is the cañon on the Big Horn River in Big Horn County, southeastern Montana. To reach it one would leave the railroad at Hardin. One can go by automobile to the cañon. It is a region little frequented by tourists.

I enclose a small map of Montana which will give you an idea of the location of these regions.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in the next issue of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.

"Land of the Lizard Men"

WHY Moorea, "an island of fantastic beauty" to Mr. Brown, is known by a less inviting title among the natives of the South Seas:

Question:—"For many, many years I have had the desire to spend my last years in the tropics, and as I shall probably have to retire in the next two or three years I am beginning to investigate in order to have plenty of time in which to come to a decision. I should like to have a small piece of land, possibly five acres, for a home, which I could improve and plant with various kinds of fruit-trees, shrubs, flowers and vegetables—a place to live in and keep me interested. I should expect to do all this work myself, or at least part of it, both for health and for interest and occupation.

Two conditions are necessary: (1) absence of cold weather, and (2) cheapness of living. The first because cold weather, even a temperature of 35 degrees, instead of bracing me up, takes all the pep out of me, and a residence of ten years in south Florida and in Panama has shown me that a hot climate agrees with me thoroughly. The second because my savings out of the small salary of nearly thirty years' service as a Government civil engineer will only produce a small income, probably not over fifty dollars to sixty dollars a month.

Desirable conditions are: (1) location on or close to the sea; failing that, on or near a stream or lake; (2) fertility of soil; (3) reasonably regular communication with the outside world; and (4) freedom from insect and other pests.

Experience has taught me that most of what are considered as a matter of course to be necessities of life are merely luxuries, and may be foregone without serious discomfort; they have become to be regarded as necessities through custom and usage, but may readily be discarded. The basic necessities of life are very few and may be summed up as food, clothing, shelter, friends. Friends are essential for mental health and life, as they constitute one's world; the others are essential for physical life and comfort. From all I have read, it appears to me that these physical necessities could be most easily supplied in some of the South Sea islands, and that the friendships can be found there as readily as in other parts of the world, or more so.

Now, as to myself: I am sixty-two years old, but just as active and vigorous as twenty years ago, and have always led an active life, much of it away from up-to-date civilization. I do not feel my age, nor do I look it, being generally taken to be between forty and forty-five. I am a civil engineer by profession; am also a good carpenter, can swing an ax or grub-hoe all day long, am a good pistol shot, have been used to sail-boats up to fifty-foot schooner most of my life, am a good handy-man and a fair cook, have good health and am not ashamed nor afraid of hard work nor of the loss of most of the refinements of civilization. I also speak French well.

Now for the questions:

(a) I gather that the Marquesas Islands are very, very rainy; how are the islands of the Society group?

(b) Would you recommend an island in the Marquesas or in the Society group, and which one?

(c) Whichever island you recommend, could a small tract be obtained by purchase or on a long lease? Its proximity to a market would not be essential as I should not expect to raise anything for the market.

(d) What would, say, five acres cost, and what would a small frame house cost?

(e) What would taxes be?

(f) Are there any noxious or obnoxious insects or reptiles?

(g) What regular steamer communication is there between Tahiti and the outside?

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(h) Is there regular steamer communication now between the Marquesas and the outside world?

(i) You state that life in Papeete will cost about forty dollars per month, including hotel, laundry and incidental expenses; is this based on the present depreciated value of the franc? McQuarrie's expenses were much greater, although he rented a house; was this due to later increased cost of everything?"—J. M. G. W., New Orleans, La.

Answer, by Mr. C. Brown, Jr.:—In all my long, long period of earth-wandering one thing I have never been able to do is to rebuff a Man, especially one of your caliber and experience. On two or three unfortunate occasions I almost did so, but not with intent, mark you. Invariably came something to correct my ill-formed impressions, so that in each instance two of us threw formality and questioning to the wind and chatted in a most amiable manner Only in this way do men arrive at an understanding.

In such a spirit I talk to you. And this brings me straight to the heart of the matter—your Island of Beginning Again!

Five acres are enough, you believe. You want only a home for that period when "the light meets the twilight." A bungalow on the sands of a lagoon shore! A place where you can extract at will untold health-gold from the precious ore of sun and soil!

In far-away French Oceania, which is just over the rim of monotony, is an island of fantastic beauty. South Sea islanders say that this is the Land of the Lizard Men, a race of dwarfs who lived on the mountain ledges and came down into the valleys to carry away the wives of the shore-dwellers. Now the island folk point out bananas growing along those ridges—the food of the Lizard Men.

(Even at this day, four years since I came to love you, Moorea, I still see you in all your pristine beauty. Dark-green and jagged, your crater leaps to meet the sun as it wakes the day. Along an indenting shore run tiny bays of gold-spangled jade, wherein snug cutters and canoes are waiting their call to adventure and to romance. Thin, lingering wisps of smoke from breakfast fires rise above cottages of brown set far in among delicate-stemmed coconut-trees—the homes of your happy planters and prosperous traders.

From a mysterious valley comes the crash of a gun, then the prolonged joyous barking of a dog. While on the slope of the beach a golden sun-boy, wearing about his loins a *pareau* and skipping home from the reef with a string of rainbow fish and a spear, laughs, "*Maitai*," which means that "All is well." . . . Oh, Moorea, indeed you are a sister island to my beautiful and beloved Tahiti!)

Let me take up your questions in order. Always keep in mind that I write of Moorea. For perhaps some day you and I will talk in the deep shade of a veranda in the Land of the Lizard Men.

(a, b) Moorea, no more than fifteen miles across from my incomparable South Sea home, is one of the largest of the eleven Society Islands. Volcanic and extremely fertile, she has a population of about 1,500. And only two per cent. are white, so I understand from the last census.

The Marquesas Islands, *hot and unusually wet*, lie almost on the line. But the Society group is scattered between the parallels of 16 and 18 south latitude and the meridians of 148 and 154 west. I have always found these islands ideally tropical, with but two seasons, Spring and Summer, and a temperature ranging from 70 to 86 degrees. The nights are cool and delightful.

(c) Good vanilla and coconut land can be purchased or leased.

(d) I do not just know what five acres will sell for now. Everything depends on location, condition, title and rate of exchange. When I return to the island world, I shall send you some very specific information.

A frame house—small but constructed of light and cooling woods, mind you—will cost about $1,200.

(e) There is no immediate direct tax on land. But one does pay three per cent. on all produce sold.

(f) A wee white lizard, a little fellow that I have come to know only as so many inches of reptilian affection, sports with one of evenings, that is, when there are no mosquitoes and flies to control the dictates of his stomach. Cockroaches, spiders and tarantulas are just so many more playfellows—harmless, you understand.

(g, h) Tahiti boasts three steamer-days a month. Sometimes it does happen that two steamers, beautiful palaces of light and splendor, lie in together for a day at Papeete, a rollicking, laughing South Sea village. One is down from San Francisco, the other on her long, stiff up-hill climb from New Zealand.

A New Zealand freighter puts in *via* Raratonga, Cook Islands and Raiatea, another Society island. Like the others, it, too, is operated by the Union Steamship Company. Hind, Rolph & Co., General Agents, 230 California Street, San Francisco, Calif., are the American representatives.

Alas! The perilous run between Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands must be made on an inter-island schooner. The voyage is crowded with all manner of adventure, I can assure you.

(i) When I wrote in 1921 "life in Papeete will cost about forty dollars per month," this amount was sufficient. Inflated currency is the explanation.

Despite the fact that the French franc depreciated from a value of a little over nineteen cents to one hardly more than six, the franc continued to buy nineteen cents of comfort; that is, until the island concerns were compelled to buy merchandise at the new rate of exchange. Then life became *très cher*, so that at least sixty-five dollars is now required. A planter can still get by on considerably less than that.

Hector MacQuarrie's expenses were much higher. The exchange, you understand, was normal at the time he rented his house.

Your remarks pertaining to the basic necessities of life are truisms. Indeed, in the Land of the Lizard Men your physical necessities can be supplied. As for friendships—well, they are there, too.

For instance, "King Mike" Fogel of Moorea! Once he was a humble sixty-dollar-a-week San Francisco musician. Today he is a South Sea king, married to a legitimate island queen and very rich in coconuts, vanilla and all those other things that go to make up an islander's wealth. "King Mike" is democratic, so much so that you'll have no difficulty in holding him as a friend.

Here's luck!

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.

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The Labrador Gold Strike

HERE'S a monograph Major Belford had us print up for him. You can get a copy free, printed on strong paper, by writing him. Don't expect an answer unless you enclose addressed return envelop and three cents in stamps, not attached.

IS THERE a strike? Undoubtedly placer gold has been found at Stag Bay. Prospectors, only a few of them, found it in the Summer of 1922 and claim it is very rich. Granted then that there is gold there, it seems reasonable to suppose that the other rivers and streams on the coast, the formation being the same, will also be auriferous.

Further it has been shown by Government surveys and by practical workings that gold exists in paying quantities all the way from The Pas in Manitoba, eastward through northern Ontario and Quebec toward the Atlantic. That whole region is highly mineralized and will some day soon be the great mining country of the world. Naturally then one would expect to find a placer field, and these men claim they have found it, on the Labrador.

On the other hand the Newfoundland Government, to whom the field belongs, neither affirm nor deny. They know no more than what has been told them by the discoverers. Claims have been staked and are reported rich, but no examination of the territory has been made for the Government, so they are not in a position to make an official statement

How large the area may be, how rich it may prove, are facts yet to be determined. This Summer will tell the story.

2. How to get there? For years there has been a service by steamer from St. John's, Newfoundland, and from Sydney, Cape Breton. The Reid Newfoundland Company's steamers gave a weekly service from St. John's, and this service will be augmented to care for any possible rush.

The sailing season is generally from the middle of June until November. Write the Reid Newfoundland Co., St. John's, Newfoundland, for sailing dates and rates. If the rush develops other lines will open up.

3. Outfit? At present there is no chance of outfitting on the spot. Stag Bay, with the exception of one or two half-breeds, is uninhabited. But supplies can be obtained in St. John's.

The conditions which governed in the Yukon will be largely repeated on the Labrador and supplies will be of the same kind. If the rush develops supplies will be brought in, but in the mean time better stock up.

4. Game? Plenty of ducks and geese in the Fall. Deer are fairly plentiful; black bear; and plenty of fish in the rivers. Salmon and trout.

5. Climate? Sub-arctic. A short, beautiful Summer. A very long Winter. The drift of ice from the north keeps the coast ice-bound except for the season mentioned.

6. Mining-law? All this territory belongs to the Dominion of Newfoundland and is governed by its law. Registrations at present must be made at St. John's. A claim is 320 acres. The claim is leased from the Government, the fee being $20 a year. Intending prospectors should procure from the Minister of Mines, St. John's, a copy of the Crown Lands Act.

7. Maps may be had from the same source, but the country has been little explored except along the coast. Few white men have ever penetrated even a short way into the interior.

An aeroplane service is rumored. One of the discoverers has organized a company in Montreal and is selling shares in the venture, I understand. If the gold is in paying quantities all the rest will right itself.

So we come back to the first question. Is there gold enough? An expedition is a gamble. But so gold-hunting always has been. In any event you want good health, a strong physique, a mind-your-own-business disposition and—guts.—JAMES F. B. BELFORD.

The Cauca Department of Colombia

ANOTHER place that has the gold lure, as the accompanying brace of letters goes to show:

El Bordo, Cauca Dept., Colombia.

EDGAR YOUNG:—Some two years ago I took your advice and came down into Ecuador as a good bet, it being between two known gold countries.

Did very poorly, and like all good bets it reversed English on me, not only in one section but in many in Ecuador; also northern part of Peru. Very little for prospectors for minerals there; and sections I had not been to others were coming out of, not being able to strike even grub-stake country.

The Ecuadorean Oriente has some little gold in it but in spite of all the men that have been there and others just coming out, nothing was being found. Spent seven months in northern Ecuadorean Oriente, and my story is same as rest. This is not a knock on the advice you are giving but simply news of this district as I have found it at present time.

Coming out of that country, I walked from Quito to La Cruz, a side trail, and then into the Cucuta and Maya country in Colombia. Formation changes about here, and although I'm not finding anything of value it looks good. Continued my walk with burro to Patia River, where first good spots showed.

Am writing on both sides of paper as they weigh letters here by the milligram almost.

This country around El Bordo is very good for prospectors, and any number of small ledges here carry free milling gold seen without a glass. Rivers and creeks all carry gold. Best part of this district is that a man can stake here anywhere; and it's one of the few countries, or I should say departments, that are not staked to death.

Haven't been here long but am part owner in some very likely prospects, especially an old river-bed of gravel a few miles from town where we have three ninety-foot tunnels in hills and so far have been driven out by water. Some in gravel-bed with roof of sandstone and some bed-rock, needing no timbering. Start of tunnels pays 38 to 47 cents per yard and at 90 feet nine feet of gravel average $3.10 per yard with two feet of bed-rock gravel running $7.04 to $23 per yard, all heavy gold. Natives robbing bed-rock have found $4 nuggets but to date my best is 18 cents, but it looks like a million after hiking two years and panning 2,000 to a cent flour gold.

Am sending you a small sample from this gravel streak. Best I have seen since the old Klondike and

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Cape Nome district, where I spent many years. Have not hit the real channel yet, as bed-rock dips one foot in 10 feet. Waiting for more finances to hit another tunnel under to relieve water and will then use spiral pipe about 3,000 feet and get 200 feet head water and hydraulic down gravel and take out in cars. Peon labor hire is only 40 cents per day and 15 cents board, and am figuring each peon to take out three yards or more a day. Sure looks good for a big thing. Gravel streak extends nine miles from Patia River to Watchacona River, and for many miles rivers parallel this valley.

Have interest in three claims on one side of a creek and three on other; each claim three square miles. Streak shows on all claims and miles-wide tests good. Some few yards of gravel. Mines can be mined like coal on caving system. Will open up one claim as soon as we can.

Outside of this personal stuff, Mr. Young, this really is a fine spot for some of the wanderers to take a chance in. Only two permanent Americans here—a Mr. Bryan, who is interested with me and found this, and another American by name of Ben Eriton who has been paralyzed and is slowly getting well. He runs the only real drug-store here.

This is a cattle town of about 300 to 400 inhabitants where there is a market each Wednesday and Saturday at square. Foodstuff is fairly cheap for this district.

Government is dickering with Mr. Wright of Panama to build railroad from Tomnco to Popayán. Popayán is two days from here by mule. This district is really the headwaters of Patia River.

You can use any part of this letter if you care to, also my name as I am a permanent fixture here that can't be driven out after what I've seen here. There are Americans coming through at times, but very few miners. Should you care for any further information of this section or trail from Quito will gladly send anything you request.

By the way, I lost my identification card and don't know number; will you report same and see if I can get another?—WILLIAM MORLOCK.

P.S.—Please see if you can get change for enclosed Canadian bill and send me some Rex white cigaret papers as these brown ones are unbearable.

And here's Mr. Young's reply:

DEAR MR. MORLOCK:—I read your letter with a great deal of interest. Also was glad to get the sample of gold from your ledge. I put it in a little cologne bottle and intend to keep it.

I am very sorry that you did not make a strike in Ecuador; but the danged stuff is "where you find it" after all. It should be in Ecuador, and I know of at least two mines that have been producing for years in that republic. Did you get up around their neighborhood?

In order to head off any others who may have a like experience in Ecuador I am sending your letter along to the editor of *Adventure* with a request that he print it. I still believe there is gold over in that Ecuador country, mainly for the reason that I have held in my hand several ounces that a hobo Swede brought here and showed me that he panned somewhere over on the Cururay and was getting himself ready to go back.

The fact that you didn't strike it and the fact that you are not berating me for the fact that you didn't make me feel strongly inclined to believe that you are a man, and I am always ready to go ninety-nine per cent. of the way for a man with principle.

I am too busy to write at any length. Will send you the cigaret papers tomorrow, and they should reach you about the time this letter does.

A Radiophone for the Ranch

THE parts necessary to build a home-made set:

Question:—"Several of the boys here are desirous of installing a radio receiving-set as a means of passing the long evenings usual in Winter on the ranch. I am writing you in hopes you can give us some pointers. First it would be well to state we know practically nothing about radio. I have had some experience though in electrical work.

Could much of the apparatus, such as coils, aerials, etc., be home-made?

If so where can I secure books or directions for constructing same?

What would be approximate cost of set to receive from say about 2,500 miles, as much of set to be home-made as possible?

Could a receiving-set be worked in connection with a 32-volt home-lighting set? That is, could the cells be used to furnish current?

Any additional information as to construction would be gratefully received."—J. A. PAYNE, Idaho Falls, Idaho.

Answer, by Mr. McNicol:—If I were on a ranch near Idaho Falls I'd sure have a radiophone receiving-set with which I could at least hear Salt Lake City, Spokane, Seattle and San Francisco.

It is possible to make a set, coil-winding and all, but it is one of those jobs which one does better the third or fourth time he tackles it than results the first time show.

It is possible now to buy a receiving-set equipped with a dry-cell vacuum tube complete for about $65. Or you could purchase the parts with which to make up a similar set for considerably less than this.

A first-class set can be made with the following parts, all of which you could probably purchase in Idaho Falls or procure from Ogden. I used to live in Salt Lake, so I know the layout.

One WD11 dry-cell vacuum tube detector	$5.00
1 dry cell	.35
1 22-volt dry battery	2.00
1 pair 2000-ohm telephones	6.00
1 variocoupler	6.00
1 43 plate condenser	2.50
1 grid leak resistance and condenser	1.00
	$22.85

The prices might vary a little, but these figures are approximate.

You would also need to put up an antenna wire about 100 feet long and 50 feet or more high, of No. 12 or 14 bare copper wire.

I enclose a diagram of the wiring of the apparatus here listed.

Alsace-Lorraine

HISTORY is history, facts are facts—and propaganda is propaganda. If Mr. Fleischer, who was a United States Army regular for years and years, can stand

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running the risk of being bawled out for a pro-German, why I guess so can the magazine:

Question:—"I would like to know about Alsace-Lorraine. When did France first hold it, back as far as history goes; and was it German before France first had it? Also what years did it change hands? Are the inhabitants French or German? Am enclosing stamps and self-addressed envelop."—A. A. CONYNE, Wise River, Mont.

Answer, by Mr. Fleischer:—In order to answer your letter correctly, I would have to write a book, and even then I'd get in wrong with the "makers of history."

I have not had the occasion to verify my statements by checking them up in the encyclopedia, but I feel confident my memory has not gone back on me as I was interested in this question myself a few years ago and have found some notes I had made then.

Of course, the name Alsace-Lorraine is comparatively new. It was created in 1871 when Germany won these provinces from France. You ask "as far as history goes," so I must answer for each province individually.

Alsace: Cæsar in the year 58 B. C. conquered the Celts, then inhabitants of the approximate areas, and brought them under Roman government. A few years later Germanic tribes, to be correct the Alemans (please note this name and the Spanish word for German, *i. e., Aleman*) crossed the Rhine and a large number of them settled there. These people were called by those who remained on the eastern shores or banks of the Rhine the "Alisâzes," which means "those sitting on the other side." From this Old-German word the name of Alsace is derived.

Much later, in 496 A. D., the Franks conquered the land, which was made part of the Kingdom of the Franks. In the year 833 the three sons of Louis the Pious agreed to divide among themselves the possessions of their father, and the province of Alsace was included in the domain of Louis the German. It changed hands several times after that, but from 1362 until 1681 it remained constantly under German rule, or at least under the rule of German princes.

After the Thirty Years' War, when Europe was more or less of a mess, customs difficulties arose, and the city of Strassburg—in 1681, I believe—asked the French King, Louis XIV, to act as "Guardian." This wily monarch, always with an eye on every opportunity to increase his revenues, extended his "guardianship" over the entire province, but it was not until 1798 that Alsace was united with France. It remained part of France until the Germans, after their victories in 1870-71, were ceded Alsace together with Lorraine. The Treaty of Versailles gave the land back to France.

Lorraine: The history of Lorraine is a complicated affair and I have not room enough within this letter to give you details. It was divided into Upper and Lower Lorraine, and each half has its own history. Part of it was part of Burgundy, but as it was always inhabited by people of Roman origin, or kinsmen of the French, it has really always been a French land, just as much as Alsace, ethnographically speaking, is German. Lorraine was only a short time under German rule before 1871.

The ratio of population is sixty per cent. German, thirty-one per cent. French and nine per cent. others.

Between you and me and the lamp-post, there are today just as many Germans under French rule as there were French under German rule before 1918—so the *casus belli* is by no means removed, and the unfortunate provinces will continue to be a cause of constant worry for the French. You will find this condition all over Europe, because it is impossible to define a hair-line frontier where one nationality lives and where the other.

There are Germans under Polish, Hungarian, Czech, Jugo-Slav and French and Roumanian rule today, but no other nationalities under German rule. In order to insure this, the "makers of history" took pains to cut such territory off Germany and Austria with little regard as to the wishes of the people. The so-called plebiscites were all right, but we also have repeaters at the polls.

Now some one reading this answer in *Adventure* will surely come along and accuse me or the magazine of German propaganda. I only hope such letters will be referred to me. I shall take particular pleasure to inform such gentlemen that I happened to be one of those whose timely interference *anno domini* 1918 gave these provinces to France. But it's dollars to doughnuts not one of us knew then what a —— of a mess we helped to cook.

How to Look for Minerals

A FEW tips on associating various rocks with various possible value-bearing content:

Question:—"What is the general geology necessary for a prospector of precious metals and stones? Would it be possible to get this knowledge from one or two good books? If so, please tell me where I might get them and the price."—FRED L. RANDALL, Denison, Tex.

Answer, by Mr. Shaw:—A big subject, upon which whole libraries have been—and still will be—written, but one which is really fairly simple, needing only study and experience, with the accent on the last named.

H. J. West says an old prospector once told him how to prospect.

"Go," he said, "until you find a country that has lots of rocks of different kinds and colors; then start in looking for minerals."

This is really what it amounts to, but you have a better chance if you dig into various books on geology and mineralogy and find out what the different kinds of rock look like and of what they are composed, as well as under what conditions they were formed. Then if you'll consent to work a while in a mine to find out how to *work* rock, you'll have a fair equipment for a prospecting-trip.

Certain minerals are associated with certain kinds of rock. For example, coal is associated always with aqueous or sedimentary rocks; gold is commonly found in quartz or spar fillings of veins, although there is really hardly a variety of rock known in which gold has not been found.

In the La Plata Mountains, southeastern Colorado, I have seen gold bedded in the common red sandstone—caused by an intruding body of igneous rock and infiltration when the rock was formed. In Alaska I have seen rich gold permeating common

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slate for the same reason. I've seen native copper running through clay in sheets.

The auriferous gravels of California are sometimes buried 1,500 feet deep under lava rocks and must be mined like metal or coal deposits, although they are in reality placer deposits. I have recently heard of an oil-well drilling-rig in Wyoming that has run through gold-bearing rock strata in the sedimentary shales.

The metals mostly found in the limestones are lead and zinc; in a hornblende formation look for chrome iron, gold, silver, copper, asbestos, soapstone, etc.; in granite look for gold, silver, tin, molybdenum, etc.; in shale you may expect coal, gypsum, rock-salt, fire-clay, etc. The volcanic regions have precious gems, sulfur and many rare metals besides gold and silver. Ancient lake-beds in the desert countries are natural depositories for the soluble minerals like niter, borax, soda, etc.

The crystalline rocks are most favorable for ore deposits, and contacts of sedimentary with volcanic rocks make conditions which are also favorable. Other good indications are intrusive volcanic rocks that have tipped the formation toward a vertical position; the presence of porphyry rocks in or near a vein; or an iron capping or gossan at the vein outcrop.

The quartz-porphyries are commonly associated with deposits of copper. Rich gold values are frequently found in sulfids of iron and copper—more especially the latter—or with the metal, tellurium.

Get "Wilson's Mining Laws," price $1.50. Also, "The Miner's Guide," by H. J. West, price $1.

Long-Distance Droving

AUSTRALIA apparently holds the world's record:

Question:—"I am planning to go to either Australia or New Zealand and would like some information on working conditions in the former.

I have handled stock all of my life. I am a fair teamster and can ride pretty well with gentle horse, but can not ride the rough string, nor can I rope.

I want to get as far from the railroads as possible, where one is not expected to dress like a banker on forty dollars a month.

I would like to get work at either freighting or riding. Is there any long-distance freighting done there? If so, where?

Are horses or mules used, and what is the number of animals used and style of hitching? Could I find work at fence-riding or horse-wrangling?

Are the ranches run there the same as in some parts of the States, where the ranch-hands do general farm-work as well as riding?

Where is the best ranching country, and what is the climate?

What wages and living conditions could one expect in either freighting or riding? Any other information you can send that will help me get settled will be appreciated.

If this is published please do not use my name."—— —— ——, Honolulu, T. H.

Answer, by Mr. Morton:—The delay in answering your letter has been due to a change of arrangements at this end, Mr. Goldie transferring the service to me. We're sorry.

You would have simply no difficulty at all in getting work out back in any Australian State. There is long-distance freighting, and long-distance droving in Australia probably makes a record in the world. I came upon a man with a big mob of cattle a while back who had been on the road with them over a year following the great stock route from the north.

No mules in Australia—horses or bullocks. Hitching, they tell me, not differing essentially from the American style.

No general farm-work on what you call ranches and we call runs (sheep) or stations (cattle)—most Australian stations don't grow so much as a carrot. The great cattle stations are mostly in New South Wales and Queensland. Climate much like the Californian; but hotter as you work north.

Wages, in proportion to cost of living, about equivalent to those paid on Western American ranches.

Fact is that if a man wants work and feels like it there is a big demand for his services anywhere in the Australian back-country. The difficulty with us is to get men away from the cities and the bright lights.

For any detailed information about fares, land laws and conditions generally, write to the High Commissioner for Australia, Australia House, London. Tell him I advised you to apply to him, and then he'll take notice.

Andros Island

THERE are two islands named Andros—one in Sacramento County, Calif.; and one in the Bahama group. This Q. and A. refers to the latter:

Question:—"I saw your letter in *Adventure* in answer to a letter to you asking about the Bahamas as a place to live. I would like a little more information. You stated that Andros Island was a good place; that there was game and woods there. What kind of game is there, and what kind of wood is there in the wooded section? How about the mosquitoes? Can one live there in Summer?"—Wm. H. White, Boynton, Fla.

Answer, by Capt. Dingle:—Andros Island is densely wooded with almost every kind of hardwood. The trees are of good size, and contain some of the finest of cabinet woods. The chief trouble would be water transport.

The game is mainly feathered—ducks, geese, flamingoes. There is a wide fresh-water lake in the middle of the island, which attracts these birds.

Some of the hardwoods are mahogany, ebony, lignum vitæ, cedar, brazilette, etc. Mosquitoes are plentiful in Summer; but as to the degree of "peskiness," that depends on you, doesn't it? It takes a lot of mosquitoes to affect me if I like a place. Another man will be poisoned by a few that I would never notice.

Andros has always appealed to me. If I were seeking a place to settle finally, outside of my own country—England—but still under its flag, and had to start in to build a new home, I think I would choose between Tasmania, Andros and Jamaica.

You of course know these places are British. I advise you to communicate with the Nassau Chamber of Commerce, asking for present possibilities of securing land in Andros.

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Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the West, old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them.

Although conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and *IF* all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelop and reply postage (*NOT* attached). Write to Mr. Gordon direct, *NOT* to the magazine.

Conducted by R. W. GORDON, 1,262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif.

"THE House-Carpenter" is very old. It is the story of "James Harris," sometimes called "The Daemon Lover," and was well known under that name in England during the eighteenth century. Walter Scott published a version in his "Minstrelsy," 5th edition, in 1812. During the last century it was widely sung in this country.

I print a version sent me by Miss Camilla Haynes through Professor R. P. Utter. Miss Haynes says: "This was mother's old song. It had once about thirty verses." The last two lines of each verse are repeated to form the chorus.

The House Carpenter

"Well met, well met, my love," he said;
"Well met, well met," said he,
"For I have sailed the sea, salt sea,
And it's all for the love of thee."
"For I have sailed the sea, salt sea,
And it's all for the love of thee."

"If you have sailed the sea, salt sea,
I'm sure you are to blame—
For I've just married a house-carpenter
And he is a very fine man."

"If you will leave your house-carpenter
And come along with me,
I'll take you where the grass grows green
By the side of the Sweet Willie."

"If I should leave my house-carpenter
And go along with thee,
What have you there to keep me on
And to keep me from misery?"

" 'Tis I have seven ships at sea
All sailing for dry land,
And seven and twenty brave stout men
To come at thy command."

She took her baby in her arms
And gave it kisses three,
Saying, "You will stay with your dear papa;
He'll take good care o' thee."

They had not sailed a week past two,
Or two or scarcely three,
Before she grieved for her house-carpenter
Likewise her sweet baby.

They had not sailed a week past three,
Or three or scarcely four,
Until the vessel sprung a leak
And the mourner was heard no more.

Ships are apt to be lost at sea,
And sailors to lose their lives,
But this was for leaving the house-carpenter
And stealing away his wife.

Those of you who are interested in comparing this American version with the older English ballad will find the materials in F. J. Child: "English and Scottish Popular Ballads," No. 243. Other American versions have been printed in the "Journal of American Folk-Lore" and in Louise Pound: "American Ballads and Songs" (Scribner's Modern Student's Library, 1922). By the way, you all ought to own a copy of that last book.

SPEAKING of other versions, I wonder if you would object if I gave you two more of "Springfield Mountain" which happen to be in my notebooks? Those who are not interested will please skip.

This song, known also as "Greenfield Mountain," "Greenland Mountain," "Woodville Mound," "The Rattlesnake," "The Mowing Song," etc., celebrated originally an event which took place at what is now Wilbraham, Massachusetts—the death of "Leut. Thomas Mirick's only Son, who dyed, August 7th, 1761, By the Bite of a Ratle Snake, Being 22 years, two months and three days old, and very nigh marridge." Nearly thirty different versions of the song are known.

I gave first an early form of the song copied for me by a friend about eight years ago from an "Historical Address, delivered at the Centennial Celebration of the Incorporation of the Town of Wilbraham, by Rufus P. Stebbins, D. D., June 15, 1863." I follow the spelling and punctuation of my original:

Elegy On The Young Man Bitten By a Rattlesnake

On Springfield mountains there did dwell
A likely youth who was knowne full well
Lieutenant Mirick onley sone
A likely youth nigh twenty one

One friday morning he did go
in to the medow and did moe
A round or two then he did feal
A pisin sarpent at his heal

When he received his dedly wond
he dropt his sithe a pon the ground
And strate for home wase his intent
Caling aloude stil as he went

tho all around his voys wase hered
but none of his friends to him apiere
they thot it wase some workmen calld
and there poor Timothy alone must fall

So son his Carful father went
to seak his son with discontent
and there hes fond onley son he found
ded as a stone a pon the ground

And there he lay down sopose to rest
with both his hands Acrost his brest
his mouth and eyes Closed fast
And there poor man he slept his last

his father vieude his track with great consarn
Where he had ran across the corn

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uneven tracks where he did go
did apear to stagger to and frow

The seventh of August sixty one
this fatal axsident was done
Let this a warning be to all
to be Prepared when God does call.

THE second version belongs to the 1840's. It comes from Mrs. W. S. Tupper of San Leandro, Calif., who says:

"I learned this song when I was a girl from the singing of Col. Thomas J. Pickett of Kentucky, then sixty years of age. Col. Pickett was a boyhood friend of Abraham Lincoln."

Springfield Mountain

On Springfield Mountain there did dwell
A likelie youth which I know'd well.
Ri tura lingdum, ri tura lingdum,
Ri tura lingdum, ri tura laay.

This likelie youth one day did go
Down in the meadiur fur to mow.

He mowed araound; at length did feel
A pizen sarpiant bite his heel.

They tuck him home to Molly dear,
Which made her feel almighty queer.

"O Willie dear, why did yer go
Down in the meadiur fur to mow?"

"O Mollie dear, I thought yer know'd
'Twas daddy's hay and must be mow'd."

Now Willie died on Molly's breast,
And in Abraham's bosom went to rest.

OUR ancestors, some of them at least, were fond of tragedy; we moderns are not so fond of it. Here are two negro songs to take off the curse. "Short'nin' Bread" is genuine negro; "Yaller Gal" I suspect of being a blend of "black-face minstrel" and negro. They came to me from Harrison C. Ryker of Oakland, California, and have been traditional in his family for some time.

Sh-rt'nin' Bread

Two little niggers, a-layin' in bed;
One turned over to the other one an' said:
"How 'bout dat short'nin'?
How 'bout dat short'nin' bread?

"Ever since dat pig's been dead,
I've been a-livin' on short'nin' bread.
How 'bout dat short'nin'?
How 'bout dat short'nin' bread?"

Yaller Gal

Oh, massa had a yeller gal;
He brought her from de South.
Her hair, it curled so very tight
She couldn't shut her mouth.

Chorus: It's a hi-yi-yi, and a hee-yi-yo;
This gal was from the South.
Her hair it curled so very tight
She couldn't shut her mouth.

Her eyes, they were so very large
They both ran into one,
And when she laughed she looked just like
A June-bug in the sun.

Her face was like a coffee-pot;
Her nose was like the spout,
Her mouth was like the kitchen stove
With the coal all shoveled out.

You ought to take a hoe-cake
An' bake it good an' done,
An' put it on a nigger's heel
An' turn it to de sun.

I know where dar's a great big house,
Forty stories high,
An' every window in dat house
Is full of chicken pie.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

AUGUST 10TH ISSUE

Besides the **complete novel** and **two complete novelettes** mentioned on the second contents page, the next issue will bring you the following stories:

SOME ADVENTURES OF JEDEDIAH SMITH — ***Frederick R. Bechdolt***
A trip through the wilderness before gold was discovered in California, and when the Great Salt Lake was still a fable.

A CERTAIN RICH MAN An Incident in the Affairs of Mohamed Ali — ***George E. Holt***
He proves that there are rubies and *rubies*.

PREPARED — ***Philip M. Fisher, Jr.***
Marsh didn't know that the Caribbean had eyes.

FREE WATER — ***Royce Brier***
In the desert it is more precious than gold.

THE THREE PALLADINS A Three-Part Story Part II — ***Harold Lamb***
And now there will be war with *Prester John*.

STRONG AND WEAK — ***John Webb***
The beach-comber was the captain's brother—no more.

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The Proper Finish Will Make Your Furniture Harmonize

Small odd pieces of modern furniture add greatly to the attractiveness of every home. You, yourself, can easily make them for your family. There is no particular trick to constructing porch swings, tables, telephone sets, etc.

The furniture, woodwork and floors of your home can be made to harmonize if a little taste is used in finishing them. You can easily refinish dingy, shabby, scratched wood. Our method involves practically no expense. All you need is a little time—a brush—and **JOHNSON'S WOOD DYE.**

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